

English as a Global Language in Multilingual Thai Universities: Perceptions and Experiences of Myanmar Students

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Abstract

This study investigated Myanmar students' perceptions of English as a global language in Thai universities, explored the factors shaping those perceptions, and examined the challenges and opportunities they experienced in multilingual academic settings. A sequential mixed-methods design was employed, combining questionnaire and semi-structured interview data. One hundred Myanmar students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate international programmes at four Thai public universities completed the questionnaire, and twelve volunteers participated in follow-up interviews. The questionnaire examined five constructs: Mutual Intelligibility, Varieties of English, Multicultural Communication, Identity, and Assessment. Quantitative findings revealed generally positive perceptions across all five constructs, with Identity recording the highest mean score and Varieties of English the lowest and most variable. Qualitative analysis identified four key factors shaping students' perceptions, as well as four challenge themes and four opportunity themes. The findings also revealed tensions between confidence and insecurity, together with differing experiences of English language development. Overall, challenges and opportunities frequently coexisted within the same multilingual environment, with communicative difficulties often accompanied by opportunities for language development and intercultural learning.

Keywords: English as a global language, intercultural communication, Thai higher education, Myanmar students

Introduction

English has become a widely used tool for communication in higher education across Southeast Asia, particularly as universities adopt English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in response to globalization and regional integration (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In this context, English functions not as a native language but as a lingua franca (ELF)-a shared medium among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds (Firth, 1996). This growing use of English among multilingual students raises important questions about how students perceive and relate to English when it is used as a global tool rather than a language tied to any particular culture or native-speaker.

Thailand has increasingly adopted English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes to support internationalization and regional integration in higher education (Lavankura, 2013). Myanmar students represent one of the largest international student populations in these programmes. According to the Thai Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, over 6,600 new Myanmar students enrolled in Thai universities in 2024 alone. Beyond their growing presence, Myanmar students represent a particularly important population for research because they have experienced a distinctive educational context shaped by political instability, resource constraints, and educational disruption (Lall, 2021; Brown & Hung, 2022). Upon entering Thai international programmes, they engage in multilingual and multicultural learning environments in which English serves as the primary medium of communication among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Despite this unique educational background and their increasing participation in Thai higher education, Myanmar students remain underrepresented in research on English as a global language, which has focused largely on East Asian contexts. Suoc et al. (2025) similarly called for further research on English use and perceptions in underrepresented ASEAN contexts, including Myanmar. Addressing this gap can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of English as a global language in multilingual university settings while also providing insights that may help universities better support international students.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What are the perceptions of Myanmar students toward English as a global language in Thai universities?
- (2) What factors influence the perceptions of Myanmar students toward English as a global language in Thai universities?
- (3) What challenges and opportunities do Myanmar students experience when using English as a global language in Thai universities?

Literature Review

1. Perceptions Toward English as a Global Language

English as a global language (EGL) refers to the status of English as a language that has developed a special role recognized across nations, functioning as a medium of official communication, education, and international exchange (Crystal, 2003). In many contemporary contexts, this communication occurs among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds, a phenomenon commonly described as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer, 2011). ELF communication prioritizes mutual intelligibility and successful communication rather than conformity to native-speaker norms. In Southeast Asian higher education, such interactions frequently occur within English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes, where English serves as the language of teaching and learning (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Although EGL, ELF, and EMI are closely related concepts, they serve different functions in this study. EGL provides the conceptual lens through which students' perceptions of English are examined, ELF represents the communicative context in which English is used among multilingual speakers, and EMI describes the institutional setting in which these perceptions are formed.

Research on perceptions of English as a global language has increasingly focused on how learners view communication across diverse linguistic backgrounds. In ASEAN higher education, Kirkpatrick and Lixun (2020) argue that the goal of English learning should be mutual intelligibility rather than conformity to Inner Circle models. Rose and Galloway (2019) similarly emphasize effective communication rather than native-speaker norms as the primary goal of English use. However, native-speaker orientations remain common among many Asian learners (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022), suggesting that acceptance of English as a global language is neither uniform nor complete across contexts.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates the ASEAN ELF framework (Kirkpatrick & Lixun, 2020) and an adapted version of the English as an International Language Perception Scale (EILPS) based on Lee and Chen Hsieh (2018). The ASEAN ELF framework (Kirkpatrick & Lixun, 2020) emphasizes the role of English as a shared means of communication among multilingual speakers and advocates mutual intelligibility, communicative effectiveness, and contextually appropriate language use over conformity to native-speaker norms. The framework also highlights the importance of assessment practices that reflect real-world communication needs rather than exclusively native-speaker standards. As the present study examines students' perceptions of English in multilingual university environments, the ASEAN ELF framework provides a suitable conceptual foundation for understanding communication-oriented views of English.

The EILPS includes dimensions related to English varieties, multicultural communication, and English-speaking identity. The scale is particularly relevant to this study because it focuses on learners' attitudes toward linguistic diversity, intercultural interaction, and ownership of English beyond native-speaker norms. These dimensions complement the communication-oriented principles of the ASEAN ELF framework and provide a means of examining students' perceptions beyond intelligibility alone.

Together, the two frameworks provide a comprehensive basis for examining perceptions of English as a global language in multilingual higher education settings. Mutual Intelligibility (MI) and Assessment (AS) were derived from the ASEAN ELF framework, while Varieties of English (VE), Multicultural Communication (MC), and Identity (ID) were adapted from the EILPS. Collectively, these five dimensions capture key aspects of English as a global language, including communication, linguistic diversity, intercultural interaction, identity, and language evaluation.

2. Factors Influencing Perceptions Toward English as a Global Language

Previous research suggests that learners' perceptions of English as a global language across dimensions such as mutual intelligibility, varieties of English, multicultural communication, identity, and assessment are shaped by a range of experiences and contextual conditions.

Communicative experience in multilingual environments has been identified as an important influence on learners' perceptions of English. Wang and Jenkins (2016) found that learners with greater ELF and intercultural communication experience became less attached to native-speaker norms and developed greater awareness of communication strategies that support successful intercultural communication. Although Canagarajah (2007) argues that communicative competence develops not merely through exposure to English but through the negotiation and

adaptation of language during interaction, both studies highlight the importance of authentic communicative engagement in shaping language use and understanding.

Exposure to diverse English varieties has also been associated with learners' attitudes toward English. Native-speaker preferences remain common among Asian learners, particularly those with limited intercultural contact (Boonsuk & Fang, 2022; Huang & Hashim, 2024). However, sustained interaction with diverse English users has been linked to more accepting attitudes over time (Mu et al., 2023). These suggest that attitudes toward English varieties may be shaped by learners' opportunities to engage with different English users in authentic communicative settings. Furthermore, linguistic identity represents another important influence on learners' perceptions. Learners who perceive their own English as legitimate rather than deficient are more likely to develop positive orientations toward English as a global language (Jenkins, 2007).

Intercultural contact has been associated with the development of intercultural competence and more flexible language attitudes (Baker, 2015; San & Htwe, 2023). However, the quality and diversity of contact appear to be more important than programme enrolment alone, as meaningful interaction across cultural groups is critical for developing intercultural sensitivity (Pastena, 2025). Finally, institutional assessment practices may shape learners' perceptions by signaling which forms of English are valued. Assessment emphasizing communicative effectiveness may reinforce EGL-oriented perceptions, whereas assessment that penalizes non-native features may reinforce native-speaker norms and undermine learners' confidence in their own English use (Canagarajah, 2006).

Collectively, these studies suggest that learners' perceptions of English are shaped through the interaction of communicative experiences, social relationships, and institutional practices rather than by exposure to English alone. At the same time, the literature indicates that these influences may operate differently across contexts, highlighting the need to examine how they are experienced by learners in underrepresented multilingual settings.

3. Challenges and Opportunities in Multilingual Learning Environments

Research suggests that studying in multilingual academic environments presents both challenges and opportunities for students using English as an additional language. This study draws on EMI research to contextualize the instructional setting in which participants' perceptions were formed, as Thai international programmes operate as EMI environments where Myanmar students engage with English-medium content alongside peers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Thumvichit & Laoriandee, 2024).

Among the most commonly reported challenges are difficulties understanding diverse English accents and varieties, particularly during the early stages of study in international programmes (Özçelik et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023). Subject-specific vocabulary has also been identified as a recurring obstacle (Jiang & Sukying, 2025), while language anxiety may reduce participation and communication (Ahmed, 2025).

At the same time, multilingual academic environments provide opportunities for language development, intercultural growth, and future career development. Dewey (2012) argues that multilingual English-using environments create authentic opportunities for language development, although Canagarajah (2007)

cautions that effective development depends on how English is used and negotiated during interaction. Intercultural contact has been associated with increased intercultural competence and broader acceptance of linguistic diversity (Baker, 2015; San & Htwe, 2023). Participation in English-medium academic programmes has also been linked to enhanced employability, expanded professional opportunities, and the development of communication skills valued in international workplaces (Ahmed, 2025; Jiang & Sukying, 2025).

As Myanmar students study within multilingual EMI environments in Thai universities, the challenges and opportunities identified in previous research provide important background for understanding their experiences of using English in multilingual academic settings.

Objectives

1. To investigate Myanmar students' perceptions toward English as a global language in Thai universities
2. To explore the factors influencing Myanmar students' perceptions toward English as a global language in Thai universities
3. To examine the challenges and opportunities Myanmar students experience when using English as a global language in Thai universities

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods design consisting of two phases. First, quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Myanmar student associations and Facebook groups affiliated with four Thai public universities. The questionnaire examined students' perceptions of English as a global language across five constructs: Mutual Intelligibility (MI), Varieties of English (VE), Multicultural Communication (MC), Identity (ID), and Assessment (AS). Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer participants from the questionnaire respondents to explore the factors influencing those perceptions and the challenges and opportunities they experienced when using English in multilingual university settings. Qualitative findings were used to provide deeper understanding of patterns identified in the survey results.

2. Participants

One hundred Myanmar students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate international programmes at four Thai public universities-Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University, Thammasat University, and King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi-participated in the questionnaire survey. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants who met the following criteria: (a) being Myanmar students enrolled at one of the selected universities, (b) being enrolled in an international programme, and (c) having completed at least one semester (approximately six months) of study in Thailand. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants*

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Level of Study	Undergraduate	66	66.0
	Graduate	34	34.0
Length of Study at University	Less than 1 year	22	22.0
	1–2 years	62	62.0
	3–4 years	15	15.0
	More than 4 years	1	1.0

Instruments

1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 18 items measuring five constructs: Mutual Intelligibility (4 items), Varieties of English (3 items), Multicultural Communication (4 items), Identity (3 items), and Assessment (4 items). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Likert, 1932).

The instrument was developed by integrating Kirkpatrick and Lixun's (2020) ASEAN ELF framework with an adapted version of Lee and Chen Hsieh's (2018) English as an International Language Perception Scale (EILPS). Items for Varieties of English, Multicultural Communication, and Identity were adapted from the EILPS, with minor wording modifications to reflect the multilingual university context of the study. Items for Mutual Intelligibility and Assessment were developed by the researcher based on key principles of the ASEAN ELF framework, particularly the emphasis on mutual intelligibility, communicative effectiveness, and assessment that reflects real-world communication needs.

Content validity was evaluated by three experts in English language teaching using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). Based on expert feedback, three items were revised to improve clarity and alignment with the intended constructs before the final administration. Prior to the main study, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 15 Myanmar students who met the participant criteria. The pilot data yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .808, indicating satisfactory reliability.

2. Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to explore the factors shaping students' perceptions of English as a global language (RQ2) and the challenges and opportunities they experienced in multilingual university settings (RQ3). The protocol consisted of two parts addressing the research questions and included a set of optional follow-up prompts to elicit more detailed responses where appropriate. Content validity was evaluated by three experts using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), and one question was revised based on their feedback before final administration. The interview protocol was pilot tested with students who met the participant criteria but were not included in the final sample to assess question clarity, wording, flow, timing, and comprehension. Minor revisions were subsequently made to improve question clarity and provide additional contextual prompts where necessary.

Validity and Reliability

Table 2 presents the factor structure of the 18-item instrument based on exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .804 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis despite the modest sample size. Five factors were extracted, corresponding to the theoretical framework, collectively explaining 63.7% of the total variance. All items demonstrated their strongest loading on the theoretically expected construct, with factor loadings ranging from .437 to .886, exceeding the minimum threshold of .40 (Hair et al., 2010). The five-factor solution provided support for the structural validity of the adapted instrument within this sample. Internal consistency reliability was acceptable to good across all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .86, exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 2

Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Adapted EGL Questionnaire

Item	Construct	Factor Loading	Factor
MI1	Mutual Intelligibility	.702	3
MI2	Mutual Intelligibility	.718	3
MI3	Mutual Intelligibility	.786	3
MI4	Mutual Intelligibility	.886	3
VE1	Varieties of English	.777	1
VE2	Varieties of English	.713	1
VE3	Varieties of English	.792	1
MC1	Multicultural Communication	.774	4
MC2	Multicultural Communication	.807	4
MC3	Multicultural Communication	.437	4
MC4	Multicultural Communication	.590	4
ID1	Identity	.491	5
ID2	Identity	.741	5
ID3	Identity	.597	5*
AS1	Assessment	.663	2
AS2	Assessment	.760	2
AS3	Assessment	.624	2
AS4	Assessment	.809	2

Note. Five factors were extracted. ID3 showed a secondary cross-loading on Factor 1 but was retained because its primary loading remained conceptually consistent with the Identity construct.

Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to examine students' perceptions of English as a global language across the five constructs.

Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were coded inductively in Taguette, and related codes were grouped and refined into themes. Interviews were conducted in English or Myanmar according to participants' preferences, and Myanmar-language responses were translated into English by the researcher. Trustworthiness was enhanced through verbatim transcription, documentation of coding decisions, and the use of representative quotations in the findings. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, coding and theme development were conducted by the researcher rather than through intercoder agreement procedures. As a Myanmar researcher studying Myanmar students in Thailand, the researcher remained aware of how shared experiences might influence data interpretation throughout the analysis.

Research Results

RQ1: Perceptions of Myanmar Students Toward English as a Global Language

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Myanmar Students' Perceptions toward English as a Global Language

Construct	M	SD	Interpretation
Mutual Intelligibility (MI)	4.20	0.70	Agree
Varieties of English (VE)	3.91	0.90	Agree
Multicultural Communication (MC)	4.13	0.62	Agree
Identity (ID)	4.32	0.76	Strongly Agree
Assessment (AS)	4.19	0.68	Agree

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that students generally held positive perceptions toward English as a global language across all five constructs, with mean scores ranging from 3.91 to 4.32, corresponding to the "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" levels. Identity recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.76$), suggesting generally positive attitudes toward maintaining participants' own linguistic identities while using English. In contrast, Varieties of English recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.90$) and the highest variability, indicating less consistent attitudes toward English accents and varieties than toward the other constructs. Overall, the findings suggest favorable perceptions of English as a means of communication, multicultural interaction, and communicatively oriented language use and assessment. Given the descriptive nature of the analysis, differences among construct means should be interpreted cautiously and are intended to provide an overview of response patterns rather than evidence of statistically significant differences.

RQ2: Factors Influencing Perceptions

Thematic analysis of the interview data identified four themes representing key factors that shaped students' perceptions of English as a global language. Table 4 provides an overview.

Table 4

Summary of Factors Influencing Students' Perceptions of English as a Global Language

Theme	Influence on EGL Perceptions
Multilingual Communicative Environment	Encouraged prioritization of intelligibility over grammatical accuracy
Personal Identity	Strengthened ownership of English while revealing occasional accent insecurity
Multicultural Contact	Increased acceptance of diverse English users and communication styles
Institutional Assessment Practices	Reinforced communicative or accuracy-oriented views of English depending on assessment approach

Theme 1: Multilingual Communicative Environment

The multilingual communicative environment emerged as an important factor shaping students' perceptions. Daily interaction with classmates and lecturers from diverse language backgrounds led participants to prioritize message clarity over grammatical correctness. As one participant explained:

"I think clear message is more important than being able to talk correctly because in our class... we just prioritize to understand what we say to each other." (P1_UG)

When communication difficulties occurred, participants reported using strategies such as repetition, clarification, and simpler language to maintain understanding. These experiences suggest that students viewed English primarily as a tool for communication rather than a language that must be used perfectly. However, several participants noted that grammatical accuracy remained important in formal academic tasks such as writing assignments.

Theme 2: Personal Identity

Personal identity and accent attitudes emerged as an important factor shaping students' perceptions. Most participants expressed confidence in their own accents and did not believe they needed to conform to native-speaker norms. As one participant stated:

"our own accent is who we are and our identity... we should not try to copy but we should try to improve our English to a standard" (P3_GR).

Many participants viewed accent as part of their cultural identity while emphasizing pronunciation clarity for effective communication. However, some reported accent-related insecurity triggered by comparison with more fluent peers.

Participants also noted that comfort with diverse accents developed gradually through exposure and experience.

Theme 3: Multicultural Contact

Multicultural contact emerged as an important factor shaping students' perceptions. Living and studying with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds encouraged greater acceptance of difference and increased appreciation of cultural diversity. As one participant explained:

"the difference in culture will bring together all the people into one — I find it really lovely and adorable" (P9_GR).

Participants also reported becoming more comfortable with different communication styles and English accents through regular interaction. One participant described unconsciously adopting the Thai particle "ka," suggesting that multicultural contact influenced not only attitudes but also communicative practices. However, some participants noted that those whose social networks remained primarily within the Myanmar community had fewer opportunities for intercultural engagement and language development.

Theme 4: Institutional Assessment Practices

Institutional assessment practices emerged as an important factor shaping students' perceptions of English. When assessment emphasized ideas and communication, participants viewed English primarily as a tool for expressing meaning rather than a system of rules to be performed correctly. As one participant explained:

"the ideas and performance are more important to be evaluated on, since the whole project and assessments are based on whether the student gets the concept or not — this is not an English exam." (P9_GR)

However, participants reported that heavy emphasis on grammar in content courses sometimes reduced their confidence and shifted attention away from idea development:

"I even forgot what I want to say and it affects the ideas parts as I have to focus a lot on grammar and vocabulary." (P11_UG)

RQ3: Challenges and Opportunities Experienced by Myanmar

Students

The qualitative findings for the third research question revealed four challenge themes and four opportunity themes. These two sides of the experience are closely connected: many of the challenges students faced in the early stages of their studies became the starting point for meaningful development over time.

Challenges

Table 5

Summary of Challenge Themes and Key Experience

Challenge Theme	Key Experience
Communicating across diverse accents	Difficulty following accent varieties, particularly in early stages
Language barriers in academic settings	Difficulties with lecture comprehension, subject-specific vocabulary, academic writing, and exclusion from Thai-medium classroom interactions
Speaking anxiety and loss of confidence	Nervousness during presentations, social comparison with fluent peers, reduced participation
Limited English practice and perceived proficiency decline	Simplified English use with peers, Burmese-dominant social networks, and increasing reliance on AI writing tools

Theme 1: Communicating Across Diverse Accents and Language

Backgrounds

The most commonly reported challenge was difficulty understanding classmates and lecturers from diverse language backgrounds, particularly in the early stages of study. Students described struggling to follow Thai, Chinese, Iranian, and native English-speaker accents in real time.

"When he says 10 things, I only understand 2 things. I was very worried at first — what would I do if I can't understand the lessons as well. (P4_UG)"

Most participants reported that this challenge diminished considerably over time through sustained exposure — connecting directly to the opportunities discussed below.

Theme 2: Language Barriers in Academic and Classroom

Communication

Beyond accent comprehension, participants described broader language barriers affecting their academic participation, including understanding lectures at speed, keeping up with subject-specific vocabulary, and the cognitive effort of translating ideas from Burmese into English before speaking.

"When catching up with the lectures, it was so difficult for me and I couldn't do very well because of the speed and accent. Moreover, I didn't know and understand the terms of social science very well. (P11_UG)"

An additional challenge emerged when lecturers and Thai students shifted temporarily into Thai during class, creating communicative exclusion for international students in English-medium programmes. Unlike accent or vocabulary difficulties, this barrier was institutional rather than linguistic in nature. Several participants reported

that they were unable to follow these exchanges because they had no access to Thai as a linguistic resource.

Theme 3: Speaking Anxiety and Loss of Confidence

Speaking anxiety was reported across all participant profiles, though it appeared in different ways depending on each student's personality and classroom environment. For some, anxiety manifested physically during presentations, causing pronunciation errors and loss of fluency:

"I am nervous and scared of people so when I have to do presentation, some of the pronunciations are wrong and sometimes, my speech is paused and I repeated the same thing for three times. (P6_UG)"

For others, anxiety prevented participation altogether, even when they had ideas to contribute:

"I have idea but I have no confidence in my English — that's why I don't participate mostly. (P5_GR)"

Theme 4: Limited English Practice and Perceived Proficiency Decline

A counterintuitive finding was that several participants felt their English had not improved, and in some cases had declined, despite studying in English-medium international programmes.

"I don't think my English proficiency has improved a lot as we have to adjust a lot to understand each other and cannot use difficult vocab. Sometimes I think my English proficiency has dropped since I have to use broken English a lot. (P4_UG)"

A small number of participants also associated frequent use of AI writing tools with reduced independent writing practice and perceived declines in writing proficiency. As one participant noted:

"I use AI more and my writing skill has dropped." (P1_UG)

Although this concern was reported by only a few participants, it suggests that some students perceived a relationship between digital tool use and their own language development.

Students in Burmese-dominant social networks faced particularly limited informal English use, pointing to a gap between the formal English demands of their programmes and the informal English ecology they actually inhabited. One participant described this directly:

"My confidence in English is reduced... I don't use English at home and also in the class, I don't speak much in English as my friends are mostly Burmese. (P1_UG)"

Opportunities

Table 6

Summary of Opportunity Themes and Key Experiences

Opportunity Theme	Key Experience
English proficiency development	Improved reading, writing, and speaking through real-world academic demands
Academic communication skills	Stronger presentation skills, critical thinking, and research competence
Intercultural competence and World Englishes awareness	Broader acceptance of diverse English varieties and cultural understanding through peer contact
Future career and academic prospects	Perceived advantage in career readiness, and international academic pathways

Theme 1: English Proficiency Development Through Real-World Exposure

Despite the challenges above, most participants reported meaningful improvements in their English through the daily demands of academic study, including reading, writing, listening to diverse varieties of English, and communicating with peers from different language backgrounds.

"In my country, I think I have to simplify my language, but now the classmates are the same level with me so I can also use the advanced vocab and I don't forget them now. (P3_GR)"

Theme 2: Development of Academic Communication Skills

A second major opportunity was the development of academic communication skills, particularly public speaking, presentation skills, critical thinking, and research competence, through the genuine communicative demands of international programmes.

"Public health is not just fixed to one country — it is global health. So, whenever the public health student got an opportunity to attend a global health event, this learning opportunity in English would create a chance to present themselves at a global level. (P9_GR)"

Theme 3: Intercultural Competence and Broader Understanding of World Englishes

Through direct and sustained contact with peers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, participants developed a broader acceptance of English variety diversity and a richer understanding of other cultures.

"Before I joined this programme, I preferred British English, American English — like native speakers. But now I can accept our English after this programme. (P10_GR)"

One participant described a shift in how she perceived her own accent after being exposed to diverse varieties of English:

"I used to think that my accent is very bad back in Myanmar. But now I see that Thai people also have accent and it is not easy to understand too. (P7_UG)"

Theme 4: Expanded Future Career and Academic Prospects

Participants consistently identified long-term career and academic benefits as meaningful outcomes of their global English experience, spanning professional communication skills, career mobility, and regional opportunities.

"I think it will be useful for future English communication because we have to meet with different people in our workplace as well. Now we have Thai teachers, Indian teachers, so when we meet with people from different backgrounds in the workplace, it will be useful for us. (P4_UG)"

Discussion

1. Perceptions of Myanmar Students toward English as a Global Language

Myanmar students held broadly positive perceptions toward English as a global language across the five constructs of Mutual Intelligibility, Varieties of English, Multicultural Communication, Identity, and Assessment. These findings suggest a tendency toward communicative views of English rather than strict native-speaker conformity, consistent with Kirkpatrick and Lixun (2020). However, the qualitative findings reveal important variation that was not fully captured by the quantitative data.

Identity recorded the highest mean score, indicating generally positive ownership of English and acceptance of participants' own linguistic identities. This finding is consistent with Chanwaiwit and Mori (2024), who found that Thai university students became more confident in using their own English accents after recognizing that variation in English accents does not necessarily hinder successful communication. Qualitative findings, however, revealed a more nuanced picture. While many participants expressed pride in their own English accents, some also reported accent-related insecurities and social comparison with more proficient international peers. These contrasting perceptions often coexisted within the same individual, suggesting that students generally held positive English-speaking identities while still experiencing occasional self-doubt.

Varieties of English recorded the lowest mean score and the greatest variation among all constructs, suggesting that attitudes toward diverse English varieties were less consistent and may still be developing among some participants. Qualitative findings indicate that participants were at different stages of acceptance. While some expressed strong support for their own and others' English varieties, others continued to compare themselves with native-speaker norms or more proficient English users. This variation may help explain the lower mean score and wider spread of responses. The finding also aligns with Boonsuk and Fang (2022), who found that international students often maintained preferences for native-speaker accents while simultaneously recognizing the legitimacy of their own English, reflecting a tension between native-speaker idealization and more global orientations toward English.

The Assessment construct similarly reflected a preference for communicative competence over grammatical accuracy. Participants consistently described assessment approaches that prioritized meaningful communication as more supportive of learning. Qualitative findings also revealed that heavy emphasis on grammatical correctness reduced confidence and sometimes hindered idea generation. This finding is consistent with Canagarajah (2006), who argued that assessment in international English contexts should move beyond formal grammatical competence toward communicative performance and language awareness. Together, these findings suggest that students value assessment practices that recognize successful communication rather than conformity to native-speaker standards.

2. Factors Influencing Perceptions of Myanmar Students toward English as a Global Language

Four key factors shaped students' perceptions: the multilingual communicative environment, personal identity, multicultural contact, and institutional assessment practices. Together, these factors provide insight into the experiences and conditions that shaped participants' perceptions of English as a global language.

The multilingual communicative environment was the most frequently reported influence. Daily interaction with speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds led students to prioritize being understood over being grammatically correct, reflecting the practical demands of communication in multilingual settings. This finding is consistent with Wang and Jenkins (2016), who found that learners with greater ELF and intercultural communication experience became less attached to native-speaker norms and developed greater awareness of communication strategies that support successful intercultural communication. This interpretation is further supported by the quantitative findings, which suggest that participants generally viewed successful communication as depending on mutual understanding rather than linguistic accuracy. Personal identity produced the most complex pattern. While the quantitative findings suggest broadly positive ownership of English, the qualitative findings revealed both confidence and insecurity. Many participants expressed pride in their own English accents and viewed them as part of their cultural identity, whereas others reported anxiety and social comparison with more proficient peers. This finding is consistent with Ahmed (2025), who found that language anxiety in EMI contexts can reduce learners' confidence and classroom participation despite the opportunities provided by multilingual learning environments.

Multicultural contact also contributed to more positive perceptions of English. Participants generally reported becoming more open to diverse English accents and communication styles through interaction with peers from different backgrounds, consistent with findings that intercultural engagement in multilingual environments promotes greater acceptance of linguistic diversity and more flexible language attitudes (San & Htwe, 2023). However, opportunities for intercultural engagement varied. Students whose social networks remained largely within the Myanmar community reported fewer opportunities for meaningful intercultural interaction and expressed a desire for greater engagement with students from other backgrounds. This finding aligns with research showing that the quality and diversity of contact, rather than programme enrolment alone, are critical for developing intercultural sensitivity (Pastena, 2025). Finally, assessment practices shaped how students perceived the role of English. Participants reported that assessment emphasizing ideas, content, and

communication reinforced the view of English as a tool for meaning-making rather than a set of grammatical rules. These findings suggest that assessment practices can influence learners' perceptions by signaling which forms of English are valued in educational settings.

3. Challenges and Opportunities Experienced by Myanmar Students

Myanmar students' experiences of using English as a global language in Thai universities were neither entirely positive nor entirely negative. Rather, the findings suggest that challenges and opportunities often emerged from the same multilingual environment. The most commonly reported challenge was difficulty understanding diverse accents, particularly during the early stages of study, consistent with Özçelik et al. (2024). However, most participants reported that these difficulties diminished over time as they gained greater exposure to diverse English users, suggesting that adaptation to linguistic diversity develops through repeated interaction (Wang & Jenkins, 2016). Language-related challenges also included subject-specific vocabulary, academic writing demands, and the cognitive effort required to process and express academic ideas in English, which have similarly been identified as common challenges in multilingual academic settings (Jiang & Sukying, 2025). Speaking anxiety was also widely reported and was often linked to social comparison with more proficient peers, consistent with findings that language anxiety can reduce learners' confidence and willingness to participate in communication (Ahmed, 2025).

A distinct challenge emerged when lecturers and Thai students shifted temporarily into Thai during English-medium classes. Unlike accent or vocabulary difficulties, this barrier was institutional and situational in nature, limiting international students' ability to fully participate in classroom interaction. This finding aligns with Sahan et al. (2022), who documented continued local language use in Thai EMI classrooms, and supports Sah and Karki's (2023) argument that students may experience exclusion when classroom language practices do not adequately accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds.

An important tension also emerged regarding English language development. While most participants reported improvement through academic and social engagement, a smaller group felt their English had stagnated or declined despite studying in an English-medium programme. These participants more often described limited English use outside academic tasks, language simplification during communication, and reliance on AI writing tools. A few participants specifically expressed concern that AI reduced opportunities for independent writing practice, echoing emerging concerns that excessive dependence on AI may limit opportunities for language development (Nhan et al., 2025). Together, these findings suggest that exposure alone does not guarantee positive language development outcomes; the quality and diversity of language use appear equally important, extending Canagarajah's (2007) argument that multilingual language development is shaped through the negotiation and adaptation of language during interaction.

Despite these challenges, participants identified several important opportunities associated with studying in multilingual university environments. Regular use of English in academic and social contexts was widely perceived as contributing to improved proficiency, supporting Jiang and Sukying's (2025) argument that multilingual academic settings provide valuable opportunities for language development. Beyond linguistic gains, participants reported becoming more accepting

of diverse English varieties and communication styles through interaction with peers from different countries. This suggests that multilingual environments may contribute to the development of intercultural competence by increasing learners' awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity (Baker, 2015; Wang & Jenkins, 2016). Participants also viewed their international university experience as enhancing future academic and career opportunities, indicating that English was valued not only as a means of communication but also as a resource for educational and professional mobility (Özçelik et al., 2024; Meenasantirak & Chaiyasuk, 2024).

Overall, the findings suggest that challenges and opportunities often coexisted within the same multilingual environment. Experiences such as unfamiliar accents, communication barriers, and speaking anxiety often coincided with the development of intercultural awareness, communicative confidence, and greater ownership of English. While the quantitative findings capture the overall direction of these perceptions, the qualitative findings reveal how they were shaped through students' everyday experiences in multilingual university settings.

Conclusion

This study examined Myanmar students' perceptions of English as a global language in Thai universities, the factors shaping those perceptions, and the challenges and opportunities they experienced in multilingual academic settings. The findings revealed generally positive perceptions of English and its role in facilitating communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. At the same time, the qualitative findings highlighted important complexities, including tensions between confidence and insecurity, as well as differing experiences of English language development.

Four key factors shaped students' perceptions: the multilingual communicative environment, personal identity, multicultural contact, and institutional assessment practices. The findings further suggest that challenges and opportunities often coexisted within the same multilingual environment. Difficulties such as accent comprehension, language anxiety, and occasional linguistic exclusion frequently occurred alongside opportunities for language development, intercultural learning, and future academic and professional advancement. Together, these findings indicate that perceptions of English as a global language are continually shaped through participation in multilingual academic communities.

This study contributes to research on English as a global language in an underrepresented ASEAN context and highlights the importance of communicative approaches to English use and assessment, meaningful intercultural interaction, and inclusive practices within English-medium programmes. Universities and educators should support students' engagement with diverse English users, create opportunities for intercultural interaction, and promote equitable participation in multilingual learning environments.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was based on a relatively small sample of Myanmar students from four Thai public universities and may not fully represent the wider Myanmar student population in Thailand. Future research could examine larger and more diverse samples, conduct comparative studies across ASEAN contexts, and explore how factors such as English proficiency, length

of study abroad, intercultural contact, and academic discipline influence perceptions of English as a global language.

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Appendix

Item	Questionnaire Item	Source/Development
MI1	I use English to understand and be understood, rather than to speak like a native English speaker.	Developed from ASEAN ELF
MI2	I feel successful when my message is clear even if my grammar is wrong.	Developed from ASEAN ELF
MI3	I understand English spoken by people from different language backgrounds as long as they speak clearly.	Developed from ASEAN ELF
MI4	I believe I can understand English spoken with a non-native accent if the message is clear.	Developed from ASEAN ELF
VE1	I accept that speaking English with an American or British accent is not necessarily important for effective communication.	Adapted from EILPS
VE2	I believe teachers can use listening materials with different accents.	Adapted from EILPS
VE3	I am comfortable hearing English spoken with different accents.	Adapted from EILPS
MC1	I can adjust my speaking style with people from other cultures.	Adapted from EILPS
MC2	I can explain my culture clearly in English to people from other cultures.	Adapted from EILPS
MC3	I accept different speaking and pronunciation styles that are different from my country.	Adapted from EILPS
MC4	I communicate appropriately with people from different cultures.	Adapted from EILPS
ID1	My teacher should not force me to sound like a native speaker when speaking English.	Adapted from EILPS
ID2	I accept my English accent as my own.	Adapted from EILPS
ID3	I do not think speaking English with an American or British accent is important for effective communication.	Adapted from EILPS
AS1	I think communicating ideas clearly is more important than having perfect grammar in oral presentations.	Developed from ASEAN ELF
AS2	I think students should not lose marks for having non-native accents when speaking English.	Developed from ASEAN ELF

Item	Questionnaire Item	Source/Development
AS3	I think English tests should reflect real-life communication.	Developed from ASEAN ELF
AS4	I think speaking English fluently is more important than speaking without grammatical errors in exams.	Developed from ASEAN ELF

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