Chinese University Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of and Attitudes towards ELF*

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It has been widely acknowledged in the academic field that English is being used as a lingua franca among people from various first language backgrounds. However, the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) does not seem to have been integrated into English classrooms, especially in China, a country from the Expanding Circle. As China has the largest population of learners of English as a foreign language, the current study aims to investigate university students' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF in the Chinese context. A total of 168 non-English major students and 30 college English teachers from a top university in Mainland China participated in the study. Two questionnaires were distributed to our student and teacher participants, respectively, and a semi-structured interview was organized afterwards. It was found that neither the students nor the teachers have sufficient knowledge about ELF, despite their awareness of the lingua franca function of English. Both the students and the teachers appear to be deeply attached to "Standard English" under the influence of "native speaker norm" in English teaching contents and methods. However, the students hold highly positive attitudes towards ELF and express their willingness to learn about it in class. Therefore, it is of vital importance for English teachers to reconsider their beliefs and teaching practices and try to incorporate an ELF orientation into English teaching.

Keywords: ELF, perceptions, attitudes

1 Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged in the academic field that English is now used as a lingua franca in intercultural communication, that is, as the common language among speakers from different first language backgrounds. (e.g., Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001; Walker, 2010). Over the past few decades, a large number of studies on ELF have been undertaken, and it has been recognized that international intelligibility is much more important than being "standard" (e.g., Archibald, Cogo, & Jenkins, 2011; Baker, 2009; Cogo, 2012). However, in English teaching practice, the notion of ELF is not as widely recognized and accepted as in the academic field. Previous studies have reported that learners of English, especially those from the Expanding Circle countries, still prefer the "native-speaker norm", and many learners seem to have misunderstandings on ELF (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2007; Wu, 2014). In addition, English textbooks and examinations are almost exclusively based on the so-called Standard English (i.e. Received Pronunciation and General American). English learners and teachers are still much attached to RP or GA in ideology and may suffer from feelings of frustration when they finally cannot reach the Utopian learning goal in reality due to maturational constraints and other factors on language learning (Munro, 2008). Under these circumstances, it is necessary and important to take the ever-changing linguistic reality into consideration in language planning and teaching; otherwise, English education practice is highly likely to lag behind linguistic reality.

Although ELF has become an increasingly popular research topic overseas, it has not received sufficient attention among researchers in Mainland China. Chinese scholars have conducted sporadic studies related to ELF (Hu, 2006; Ran, 2013; Wen, 2012, 2013, 2014; Wu, 2013, 2014), but few of them have examined our English learners' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF in the Chinese context. Due to academic mobility and student exchange programs, Chinese students and teachers have abundant opportunities for international communication. If they are not aware of or equipped with knowledge of ELF, they may not be able to cope with various authentic situations of intercultural communication. To address the lack, this study aims to undertake an investigation of Mainland Chinese university students' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF, with the hope of shedding light on current English teaching in the Expanding Circle.

2 Literature Review

2.1 English as a Lingua Franca

With globalization, the English language has become a common language for people when travelling abroad, having transnational business and attending

international conferences. As Berns (2009, p.194) claimed, "the most wide-spread contemporary use of English throughout the world is that of English as a lingua franca, i.e. English used as a common means of communication between speakers from different first-language backgrounds".

Jenkins (2011, p.928) regarded English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as ''an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages''. "An additionally acquired language system" indicates that even for native English speakers, if they want to communicate successfully, they need to make efforts to acquire this additional language system as well. From this perspective, ELF allows non-native English speakers to enjoy advantages over monolingual native English speakers within multilingual communication, for they have more linguistic resources to resort to in terms of negotiation of meanings. Jenkins, Cogo, and Dewey (2011) differentiated ELF from World Englishes in that the research into the latter remains interested primarily in the study of varieties of English, such as Indian English and Singaporean English, whereas the research into the former views English as a fluid, flexible and contingent tool of communication for intercultural communication.

This internationalization of English has inevitable consequences not only "for the way it is used but also the way it is conceptualized and implications for the way it is taught" (Cogo, 2012, p.97). Therefore, ELF researchers focus not only on the recognition of core features of ELF, but also on the description of practices in ELF communication. Over the past few decades, research of ELF has been gradually established as an independent discipline with the efforts of ELF researchers (Wen, 2014). For instance, the International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca has been held annually since 2008 and every year the participants are over 300, indicating that a stable ELF research team has come into being. Besides, de Gruyter Mouton launched *The Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* in 2012, and an academic platform for ELF research exchange has been set up. In addition, every year more and more PhD students choose ELF as the topic of their dissertation (Wen, 2014). In the following is a brief review of the previous research on ELF abroad and in China.

2.2 Previous studies on ELF

ELF researchers once tried to establish ELF as a legitimate variety like the other already established varieties of World Englishes, but after they realized the dynamics and creativity of the processes of ELF, they have turned to describing the practices involved in lingua franca communication (Cogo, 2012). Generally, there have been three linguistic levels of ELF research, namely lexicogrammar, phonology and pragmatics, and two main domains,

namely business and academic English (e.g., Firth, 1996; Hullen, 1982; Jenkins et al., 2011; Knapp, 1985).

Knapp (1985) emphasized the significance of empirical studies to identify the functions and forms of ELF that can be used as English teaching contents. Jenkins (2000) conducted an empirical study on the pronunciation of ELF, in which she identified features of form and function of ELF mentioned by Knapp (1985). Seidlhofer (2001) published one work arguing that ELF is the most widespread use of English all over the world. More importantly, in this publication she appealed for an empirical research agenda to fulfill the "conceptual gap" of ELF. Jenkins' (2000) and Seidlhofer's (2001) works have become the turning point of ELF research, for they drew great attention of applied linguists and English teaching professionals. They argued that though English has been used as a Lingua Franca over the world for a long time and systematic features of ELF have been explored, speakers of ELF are still considered as norm-dependent on RP or GA, which "preclude[d] us from conceiving of speakers of lingua franca English as language users in their own right" (Jenkins et al., 2011, p.282).

In an attempt to fulfill the conceptual gap of this linguistic reality, Seidlhofer (2001) appealed to the plan to set up linguistic corpus of ELF. She compiled the first ELF corpus called Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), in which communications of non-native English speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have been indexed. Soon later the corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic settings (FLFA) was established under the supervision of Mauranen (2003). In the Asian context, Kirkpatrick (2010) and his team have compiled the Asian Corpus of English (ACE) in Hong Kong. The establishment of these corpora brought great convenience for linguists to undertake ELF studies.

More recently, Jenkins (2015) proposed the notion of multilingualism with ELF, that is, ELF is considered as an integral part of multilingualism research. Jenkins (2017, p.600) further argued that "for the foreseeable future there will most likely be many kinds of Englishes used predominantly in transcultural communication among multilingual English speakers, who will make use of their full linguistic repertoires as appropriate in the context of any specific interaction."

Research findings in ELF have important implications for ELT. However, "so far there has been little detailed discussion of how different varieties of English, or how the dynamic variability of ELF, might impact on language MODELs or METHODOLOGY", as Jenkins et al. argued (2011, p.35, emphasized originally). One possible reason is that there have been few studies on ELF perceptions and attitudes. Jenkins et al. (2011) reviewed the previous research and argued that European younger English users hold positive attitudes towards ELF while teachers reveal an ambivalent attitude. Moreover, there are also challenges and doubts on ELF research. Some native-speaker norm supporters examined the learners' preferred English

models, arguing that most learners prefer native speaker models, and claimed that teachers should respect learners' preferences and continue to strictly adhere to native speaker norms (e.g. Subtirelu, 2013). However, these studies have not investigated the reasons why learners have such unrealistic preferences. If students were aware of the current use of English in the world, would they still adhere to the unrealistic native speaker models?

Although ELF research has been gaining popularity overseas in the past decades, relatively few studies have been carried out in China. In the early 1990s, Li (1993) pointed out the fact that English has been used as a lingua franca worldwide, arguing that the more English is regarded as an international communication tool, the less it should be considered a proprietary owned by only one nation or people. Wen and Yu (2003) discussed the internalization and localization of English and regarded them as two complementary aspects. They argued that the process of internalization is a prerequisite for English used as a lingua franca worldwide, and that the process of localization is a precondition for intercultural communication between different countries. Wen and Yu proposed that we should integrate internalization with localization during English teaching in China, and nurture students' intercultural communicative competence. Wen (2014) made further suggestions for ELF research from two perspectives: One is to investigate the regularity, variability, dynamics and complexity of ELF used by specific groups on the basis of multi-entity view, and the other is to explore how to apply research results of ELF to language teaching.

Although ELF has become a linguistic reality throughout the world, English learners' and teachers' concepts of ELF may not necessarily have been updated. Wu (2014) conducted a study on university teachers' language attitudes in China, and found that most English teachers still stick to traditional language concepts and programs, such as using examination-oriented teaching methods, and hold negative or skeptical attitudes towards China English. However, Wu has not analyzed teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF.

2.3 Research gaps

Although many studies have been carried out to investigate the specific characteristics of ELF speakers (e.g., Firth, 1996; Hullen, 1982; Jenkins et al., 2011; Knapp, 1985), few researchers have explored English learners' and teachers' views and attitudes towards ELF. Jenkins et al. (2011) stated that both learners' and teachers' awareness of and attitudes towards ELF play significant roles in ELT. For one thing, if teachers are not aware of ELF or hold negative attitudes towards it, chances for them to incorporate ELF in teaching are slim. For another, if learners do not receive an appropriate guide

from teachers, they may not have a proper understanding of ELF, let alone accept it.

To address the lack, this study aims to explore university students' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF, in order to find out if they are aware of this linguistic phenomenon and what kind of attitudes they hold towards it. The specific research questions are as follows.

(1) How do Chinese university students and teachers perceive English as a Lingua Franca?

(2) What are the students' and teachers' attitudes towards English as a Lingua Franca?

3 Research Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study consist of students and English teachers from a top university in Mainland China. Their detailed information is as follows.

3.1.1 Student participants
The student participants were randomly chosen from various non-English majors with the help of their English teachers. Sixty university students from each year (except year four) participated in the study, respectively. In total, 168 students successfully completed the questionnaire, including 60 Year 1 students (freshmen), 54 Year 2 students (sophomores), and 54 Year 3 students (juniors). Table 1 presents the students' background information.

Table 1. The Student Participants' Demographics

Group	Number	Age	English learning experience (years)	Gender	
				F	M
Year 1	60	18.6	8.1	26	34
Year 2	54	19.1	9.8	36	18
Year 3	54	20.3	10.2	22	32
Total	168				

3.1.2 Teacher participants
Thirty College English teachers from the same university volunteered to participate in this study, including 21 females and 9 males. They are all native Chinese teachers of English. Their average age is 41.95, and the average English teaching experience is 15.8 years. As they are the student participants'

English teachers, their teaching methods and contents are bound to have a
great impact on the students' perceptions and attitudes.

3.2 Instruments

Two types of research instruments, namely questionnaires and interviews,
were adopted in this study. Based on previous descriptions and concepts of
ELF (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2011), two questionnaires have been designed: one
for the students and the other teachers. The students and teachers responded
to a number of statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1
(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The statements are concerned about
such concepts as Standard English, English varieties, intelligibility, English
learning and teaching goals, and intercultural communication, which are
often involved in the discussion on ELF. For the sake of clarity and
convenience, the original questionnaires distributed to our participants were
in Chinese and later translated into English for writing this paper.

3.2.1 Student questionnaire
The students' questionnaire consists of three parts and 51 statements in total.
Part One is to gather the students' background information, such as age,
gender, major and English learning experience.

Part 2 consists of 24 statements concerning the students' awareness
and knowledge of ELF (See the items in Table 2). It involves six aspects,
namely, understanding of ELF (No. 1~5), ideas of Standard English (No. 6,
17~20), knowledge of English varieties (No.7~11), English learning goals
(No.12~14), learning English cultures (No.15~16), and English
communication experience (No.21~24).

Part 3 includes 27 statements (See the items in Table 3), concerning
the students' attitudes towards ELF (No.25~26), Standard English (No.27~31,
38), intelligibility of English (No.32~37, 39), China English (No.40~45),
intercultural communication (No.46~49), and towards learning ELF in
English class (No.50~51), respectively.

3.2.2 Teacher questionnaire
Parallel with the students' questionnaire, the teachers' questionnaire also
consists of three parts. Part One is to gather the teachers' background
information, such as age, gender and English teaching experience.

Part 2 consists of 25 statements concerning the teachers' awareness
and knowledge of ELF (See the items in Table 4). It involves six aspects,
namely, understanding of ELF (No. 1~5), ideas of Standard English (No.
6~9), knowledge of English varieties (No.10~14), English teaching practices
(No.15~18), English teaching goals (No.19~23), and beliefs on teaching
cultures (No.24~25).

Part 3 includes 25 statements (See the items in Table 5), concerning the teachers' attitudes towards ELF (No.26~27), Standard English (No.28~31, 34, 36), intelligibility of English (No.32~33, 35, 37~38), China English (No.39~44), intercultural communication (No.45~48), and towards current English textbooks (No.49~50), respectively.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interview

Three teachers and nine students, three from each year, were approached by the researchers at random, and they all happily accepted our invitation to participate in a one-on-one interview. They were asked about their beliefs of and attitudes towards ELF[1]. There are only a few questions as follows:

(1) In your opinion, what is ELF?
(2) Do you know English varieties? Could you list some of them?
(3) What is your attitude towards ELF?
(4) What is your model of learning (teaching) English?

3.3 Data collection and analysis procedures

The data was collected from the students at three different times. Each time, the questionnaires for students were distributed about 25 minutes before class with the help of their teacher. With permission, a brief self-introduction was made and the purpose of the survey was explained. It was emphasized that there was no right or wrong answer to each question and that honest and immediate responses would be appreciated. It took about 20 minutes to finish the questionnaire. In total, 180 copies were distributed, and 168 questionnaires were completed and thus adopted for data analysis.

As for the teachers' data, the questionnaires were distributed before their departmental meeting in Foreign Language Department of the same university as the students, and 30 completed copies were obtained.

The interview with the students was held later after class and that with the teachers after their departmental meeting. Each one-on-one interview lasted for about 10 minutes.

The survey data were analyzed by using SPSS in the following steps:

(1) Descriptive statistics of the students' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF, respectively;

(2) One-way ANOVA among the three groups of students.

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[1] The Chinese translation of the term ELF is widely known in China. But the English term ELF is seldom explicitly taught to students by English teachers. I am very thankful for one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out this issue.

4 Results

The descriptive statistical results and ANOVA results are reported in this section.

4.1 Results of descriptive statistics

The descriptive results of the students are summarized in Tables 2 and 3 below, and the descriptive results of the teachers are displayed in Table 4 and Table 5, respectively.

4.1.1 Student participants' results

The descriptive results of the students' perceptions and awareness of ELF are summarized in the following Table.

Table 2. Descriptive Results of Student Participants' Perceptions of ELF

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
N1	I have heard about English being used as a Lingua Franca.	**4.43**	.73
N2	I have had some knowledge of ELF.	3.35	.97
N3	I think ELF is a common phenomenon.	**4.15**	.83
N4	I think ELF is the use of English by people from different countries.	3.63	.87
N5	I think ELF is the use of Standard English internationally.	3.53	.97
N6	I think Standard English is the British English (BBC) or American English (VOA).	3.30	1.11
N7	I know the English used by different countries has different features.	3.85	1.20
N8	I know there are various English varieties (Indian English & Singaporean English).	**4.01**	.95
N9	I think BBC and VOA are just two varieties of English.	3.46	1.07
N10	I think Indian English is an English variety.	3.61	1.04
N11	I think China English is an English variety.	3.43	1.13
N12	I learn English for communicating with native English speakers (American & British).	3.32	1.07
N13	I learn English for communicating with people of different countries (America, British, Japan, India, Germany and etc.)	3.52	1.09
N14	I learn English for passing various examinations.	3.17	1.15
N15	I know the learning of different countries' cultures is important in language study.	**4.00**	.81
N16	I know it is important to learn how to express one's own country's cultures in English.	**4.13**	.87
N17	I have been trying to reach the level of Standard English.	3.91	3.23
N18	I often practice the pronunciation of Standard English.	3.21	.91

N19	I often watch English movies or programs to imitate the pronunciation of native English speakers.	3.22	1.01
N20	I want my English to sound Standard while communicating with British or American speakers.	3.78	.94
N21	I often try to communicate with people of different countries in English.	2.57	.98
N22	In English communication, I don't mind being standard or not as long as I can make myself understood.	2.92	1.01
N23	In English communication, I can use some communication strategies (paraphrase, repetition and etc.).	3.32	.95
N24	While communicating with people of different countries in English, I would try to solve misunderstandings if there were any.	3.88	.82

As is shown in Table 2, N1 has the highest mean (4.43), indicating that the students have heard of ELF. Their awareness of ELF is further supported by their agreement to statements N3 (Mean=4.15) and N8 (Mean=4.01). However, their responses to N2, N4 and N5, whose means are all lower than 4, seem to suggest that they do not have a clear view about ELF. The students also highly agree with N15 (Mean=4.00) and N16 (Mean=4.13), suggesting that they are aware of the importance of learning different cultures and expressing their own culture in English.

In contrast, N21 has the lowest mean (2.57), showing that most students do not have many experiences of English communication with foreigners in daily life. Their relative high mean in N17 (3.91) and low mean in N22 (2.92) indicate that they seem to aspire to speak Standard English.

The descriptive results of the students' attitudes towards ELF are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Results of Student Participants' Attitudes towards ELF

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
N25	I think it is necessary to learn about ELF.	**4.00**	.78
N26	I think it is an advantage to have knowledge of ELF.	**4.05**	.87
N27	I think it is proud of me, if I can speak Standard English.	3.80	1.00
N28	I think I can reach the level of Standard English as long as I make enough efforts.	3.57	.99
N29	I think Standard English is perfect, which should not be doubted.	2.36	1.00
N30	I would still prefer Standard English, even if various examinations were not based on it.	3.40	.98
N31	I think we must use Standard English to communicate with foreign people.	2.75	.90

N32	I think we must imitate native speakers to ensure intelligibility of English.	2.71	.91
N33	I think various English varieties impede intelligibility of English.	2.82	1.01
N34	I focus more on whether my English is standard while communicating with natives.	3.14	.88
N35	I focus more on whether my English is understandable while communicating with non-natives.	3.58	.86
N36	I think intelligibility of English is more important than being standard.	3.34	.92
N37	I think my English is intelligible, though not so standard.	3.49	.79
N38	I still target at Standard English, though theoretically I accept English varieties.	3.83	.83
N39	I think intelligibility is more important than correctness in English communication.	3.98	.86
N40	I think we should avoid speaking China English.	3.84	.88
N41	I think we can use China English to communicate with foreigners as long as we can be understood.	3.16	.93
N42	I think sometimes China English expressions are easier to understand in communication.	2.77	.97
N43	I do not mind the accent of China English while I speak English.	3.16	1.05
N44	I do not mind the use of China English while I use English.	2.82	1.02
N45	I will be more confident to learn English, if China English is accepted.	3.29	1.04
N46	I think it is important to learn communication strategies in English learning.	**4.07**	.73
N47	I think there are big chances for me to join intercultural communication in the future (studying, working and travelling abroad).	3.37	1.18
N48	I think there are bigger chances for me to communicate with non-native speakers in the future.	3.02	1.02
N49	I think knowledge of different countries' cultures is critical to intercultural communication.	**4.03**	.78
N50	I think knowledge of current textbooks is enough for me to cope with future intercultural communication.	2.59	1.05
N51	I hope to learn more about ELF in English class.	3.88	.89

As Table 3 shows, the means of four items are above 4, including N25 (4.00), N26 (4.05), N46 (4.07) and N49 (4.03), suggesting that the students hold very positive attitudes towards the learning of ELF knowledge, communication strategies and foreign cultures. Their attitudes towards Standard English and China English seem to be quite complicated. On the one hand, they generally agree with N27 (Mean=3.80), N38 (Mean=3.83) and N40 (Mean=3.84), holding positive views towards Standard English; on the other hand, they also know intelligibility is more important than correctness

(N39, Mean=3.98). They are not satisfied with the current textbooks and hope to learn more about ELF in English class (N51, Mean=3.88).

4.1.2 Teacher participants' results

The descriptive results of the teachers' knowledge and awareness of ELF are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Results of Teacher Participants' Perceptions of ELF

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
N1	I have heard about English being used as a Lingua Franca.	**4.28**	.92
N2	I have had some knowledge of ELF.	3.83	1.00
N3	I think ELF is a common phenomenon.	**4.07**	.88
N4	I think ELF is the use of English by people from different countries.	**4.00**	.85
N5	I think ELF is the use of Standard English internationally.	3.72	.84
N6	I think Standard English is the British English (BBC) or American English (VOA).	3.48	1.02
N7	I generally teach English by following Standard English (GA or RP) strictly.	3.76	.74
N8	I always encourage students to reach the level of Standard English.	3.76	.69
N9	I believe students can reach the level of Standard English with enough efforts.	3.26	.70
N10	I know the English used by different countries has different features.	**4.14**	.74
N11	I know there are various English varieties (Indian English & Singaporean English).	**4.07**	.92
N12	I think BBC and VOA are just two varieties of English.	3.90	.94
N13	I think Indian English is an English variety.	3.66	1.08
N14	I think China English is an English variety.	3.31	1.14
N15	I would impart knowledge of English varieties to students purposely in English class.	3.48	.87
N16	I would impart knowledge of ELF to students purposely in English class.	3.72	.92
N17	I would impart knowledge of intercultural communication to students in English class.	**4.24**	.74
N18	I would teach intercultural communication strategies to students in English class.	**4.07**	.75
N19	I think the purpose of college English is to help students pass various examinations.	2.35	.77
N20	I think the purpose of college English is to help students master Standard English.	3.35	.76
N21	I think the purpose of college English is for communicating with native speakers (British or American etc.).	3.48	.95

N22	I think the purpose of college English is for communicating with speakers of different countries (Britain, America, Japan, Germany, and French etc.).	3.90	.86
N23	I think the purpose of college English is to help students apply English flexibly and cope with different communication situations.	**4.10**	.77
N24	I don't think it is enough for college English books to include only British and American cultures.	**4.00**	1.00
N25	I think college students should be able to express their own country's cultures in English.	**4.14**	.92

As Table 4 demonstrates, N1 has the maximal mean (4.28), showing that most teachers are conscious of the fact that English is being used as a lingua franca. N19 has the minimal mean (2.35), indicating that the majority of teachers disagree that the main goal of English teaching is to help students pass examinations. Except N6 (3.48), N9 (3.26), N14 (3.31), N15 (3.48), N20 (3.35) and N21 (3.48), the means of all the other items are higher than 3.50, indicating that the teachers largely agree with these statements. The high agreement to statements concerning ELF indicates that the teachers have clear awareness and understanding of ELF. They do not emphasize exams, but advocate the teaching of intercultural knowledge (N17, Mean=4.24).

The descriptive results of the teachers' attitudes towards ELF are summarized in the following Table.

Table 5. Descriptive Results of Teacher Participants' Attitudes towards ELF

Items	Statements	Mean	SD
N26	I think it is necessary for college students to learn about ELF.	**4.04**	.98
N27	I think it is an advantage for college students to have knowledge of ELF.	**4.07**	.84
N28	I think it is proud of me, if I can speak Standard English.	3.97	.68
N30	I think Standard English is perfect, which should not be doubted.	3.31	1.00
N30	I would still prefer Standard English, even if various examinations were not based on it.	3.86	.69
N31	I think we must use Standard English to communicate with foreign people.	3.28	.79
N32	I think we must imitate native speakers to ensure intelligibility of English.	3.24	.74
N33	I think various English varieties impede intelligibility of English.	3.21	1.08
N34	I focus more on whether my English is standard while communicating with natives.	3.31	.81
N35	I focus more on whether my English is understandable while communicating with non-natives.	3.76	.83
N36	I still target at Standard English, though theoretically I accept English varieties.	3.45	.95

N37	I think intelligibility is more important than correctness in English communication.	3.93	.84
N38	I think intelligibility of English is more important than being standard in oral English.	3.90	1.01
N39	I think most students' pronunciations are not perfectly standard.	3.97	.87
N40	I think Chinese students should try to avoid speaking China English.	3.97	.63
N41	I think we can use China English to communicate with foreigners, as long as it is understandable.	3.62	.94
N42	I don't mind the accent of China English spoken by students.	3.76	.91
N43	I think sometimes China English expressions are easier to understand in communication.	2.97	.98
N44	Students will be more confident to learn English, if China English is accepted.	3.17	1.00
N45	I think it is important to learn communication strategies in English learning.	3.90	.86
N46	I think there are big chances for students to join intercultural communication in the future (studying, working and travelling abroad).	**4.21**	.73
N47	I think there are bigger chances for students to communicate with non-native speakers (Japanese, Korean etc.) in the future.	3.76	.74
N48	I think knowledge of different countries' cultures is critical to intercultural communication.	**4.07**	.75
N49	I think knowledge of current textbooks is enough for students to cope with future intercultural communication.	3.21	1.05
N50	I hope more knowledge of ELF will be added into English class in the future.	3.79	.86

Table 5 demonstrates that N46 has the highest mean (4.21), indicating that the teachers think there are big chances for their students to engage in intercultural communication in the future. N43 has the lowest mean (2.97), showing their doubts on the clarity and intelligibility of China English. The means of most of the other items are higher than 3.50, indicating that the teachers tend to agree with these statements. Interestingly, the teachers' and students' attitudes towards ELF are in line with each other.

4.2 Results of one-way ANOVA

One-way ANOVA was conducted to find out whether there are significant differences among the three groups of students and Post Hoc Tests were carried out to locate the differences between groups. Based on the questionnaire, the results are also divided into two parts, i.e. Perceptions of ELF and Attitudes towards ELF.

4.2.1 Perceptions of ELF

Table 6 summarizes the significant results of the students concerning their perceptions of ELF. Only items with obvious significant differences have been shown ($p<0.05$), except statement N8, whose p value is close to 0.05.

Table 6. ANOVA Results of Student Participants' Perceptions of ELF

Items	Statements	F	Sig.
N7	I know the English used by different countries has different features.	4.56	.012
N8	I know there are various English varieties (Indian English & Singaporean English).	3.03	.051
N16	I know it is important to learn how to express one's own country's cultures in English.	4.21	.016
N18	I often practice the pronunciation of Standard English.	5.81	.004
N20	I want my English to sound Standard while communicating with British or American speakers.	3.98	.020
N22	In English communication, I don't mind being standard or not as long as I can make myself understood.	3.68	.027

From Table 6, we see that only five items have achieved significant differences. Post Hoc Tests were then carried out in order to locate the differences between groups. The results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Post Hoc Tests' Results of Student Participants' Perceptions of ELF

Items	Statements	Year	Year	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
N7	I know the English used by different countries has different features.	1	2	.64*	.23	.013
N8	I know there are various English varieties (Indian English & Singaporean English).	2	3	-.45*	.18	.046
N16	I know it is also important to learn how to express one's own country's cultures in English.	1	2	.44*	.16	.021
N18	I often practice the pronunciation of Standard English.	1	3	.56*	.17	.003
N20	I want my English to sound Standard while communicating with British or American speakers.	1	2	.44*	.17	.038
N22	In English communication, I don't mind being standard or not as long as I can make myself understood.	1	2	-.49*	.19	.026

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Table 7 suggests that Year 1 and Year 2 students are significantly different with each other in most of the statements above. In contrast, Year 2 and Year 3 students have significant difference only in N8, and Year 1 and Year 3 students differ significantly only in N18 ($p<0.05$).

4.2.2 Attitudes towards ELF
Table 8 summarizes the significant results of the students concerning their attitudes towards ELF. Only items with obvious significant differences have been shown ($p<0.05$).

Table 8. ANOVA Results of Student Participants' Attitudes towards ELF

Items	Statements	F	Sig.
N25	I think it is necessary to learn about ELF.	4.36	.014
N26	I think it is an advantage to have knowledge of ELF.	3.45	.034
N36	I think intelligibility of English is more important than being standard.	7.54	.001
N38	I still target at Standard English, though theoretically I accept English varieties.	5.26	.006
N43	I do not mind the accent of China English while I speak English.	6.11	.003
N44	I do not mind the use of China English while I use English.	5.37	.005
N49	I think the knowledge of different countries' cultures is critical to intercultural communication.	5.25	.006
N51	I hope to learn more about ELF in future English class.	4.55	.012

From Table 8, we can see that eight items have significant differences ($p<0.05$). To illustrate the differences between groups, the results of Post Hoc Tests are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Post Hoc Results of Student Participants' Attitudes towards ELF

Items	Statements	Year	Year	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
N25	I think it is necessary to learn about ELF.	1	3	.38*	.14	.026
N26	I think it is an advantage to have knowledge of ELF.	1	3	.394*	.16	.046
N36	I think intelligibility of English is more important than being standard.	1	2	-.63*	.17	.001
N38	I still target at Standard English, though theoretically I accept English varieties.	1	3	.43*	.15	.015

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N43	I do not mind the accent of China English while I speak English.	1	2	-.63*	.19	.004
N44	I do not mind the use of China English while I use English.	1	3	-.54*	.19	.014
N49	I think the knowledge of different countries' cultures is critical to intercultural communication.	1	2	.43*	.14	.009
N51	I hope to learn more about ELF in future English class.	1	2	.46*	.16	.016

According to Table 9, Year 1 group has significant differences from the other two groups in the statements above. In statements N25, N26, N38 and N44, Year 1 group is significantly different from Year 3, and in statements N36, N43, N49, N51, Year 1 group has significant differences from Year 2.

5 Discussion

5.1 Perceptions of ELF

In this study, the perceptions of ELF were investigated from six aspects, namely, understanding of ELF, ideas of Standard English, knowledge of English varieties, English learning or teaching goals, culture in English learning, and English communication or teaching experiences.

Statements N1 and N3 in both the students' and teachers' questionnaires have very high means (above 4), suggesting that the reality of English being used as a lingua franca has been well recognized by the participants, consistent with our anticipation[2]. China has the largest number of English learners in the world and the Chinese government has taken various measures to stimulate English learning and teaching (Wen, 2012). With globalization, English has been recognized as the official language among APEC countries. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that Chinese students and teachers are well aware of the lingua franca function of English. However, the students do not seem to have sufficient knowledge about ELF, as their response to statement N2 is merely 3.35. In contrast, the teachers' response looks more positive, yet unsatisfactory, with a mean of 3.83. This result suggests that the knowledge of ELF needs to be introduced and explained in English class.

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[2] It was found that for N1, the students' mean (4.43) was higher than the teachers (4.28). However, independent t-test shows that the means of the student group and the teacher group have no significant difference (p=.312>.05). I am very thankful for the anonymous reviewers for pointing out this difference.

The concept of Standard English is often the focus of discussion in ELF research. It has been reported that Chinese learners of English are norm-dependent on RP or GA (Wu, 2014). However, in the current study, the students expressed their uncertainty with statement N6 (Mean=3.30); so do the teachers (Mean=3.48), suggesting that they do not seem to equate Standard English to RP or GA. Research on World Englishes and ELF has been developing in great momentum, which appeals for the plurality of English and the right of non-native English speakers (Jenkins et al., 2011, p.282). Outer Circle Englishes, such as Indian English, and the other Inner Circle varieties, such as Australian English and Canadian English are relatively well known in the world. This may help explain why the teachers and students do not agree with statement N6.

The participants' plural view of English has been further witnessed in their responses to statements N7 (Mean=3.85) and N8 (Mean=4.01) in the student questionnaire and N10 (Mean=4.14) and N11 (Mean=4.07) in the teacher questionnaire. Obviously, both the students and teachers are aware of the existence of various English varieties, such as Indian English and Singaporean English. In addition, the students relatively agree that Indian English is a variety (N10, Mean=3.61), while they are uncertain with China English (N11, Mean=3.43). Interestingly, the teachers hold exactly the same views towards Indian English (N13, Mean=3.66) and China English (N14, Mean=3.31). English is not an official language in China, and Chinese people often have no idea about the difference between China English and Chinglish (Li, 1993). In contrast, English is an associate official language in India, and Indian English is relatively well known due to the popularity of Bollywood movies in China. Our participants seem to be quite clear about the different social statuses of English in China and India.

There are significant differences ($p<0.05$) between Year 1 and Year 2 groups in statement N7, namely the perceptions of differences between English varieties, and between Year 3 and Year 2 groups in statement N8, namely the perceptions of existence of different English varieties. These results seem to suggest that Year 2 students have significantly weaker awareness of English varieties than the other two groups. Year 1 students are fresh and enthusiastic, so they may be more open-minded to accept new concepts, and Year 3 students may already know or have contact with different varieties. Year 2 students are still at a transient stage and their awareness is the weakest.

As for English learning or teaching goals, the mean of statement N17 reaches as high as 3.91, indicating that most students target at Standard English. However, it is interesting to note that the students have not paid great efforts to reaching the target goal, as the means of English pronunciation practice (N18 and N19) are lower than 3.5. But again in statement N20 (Mean=3.78), they agree that they want to sound standard when communicating with American or British speakers. The students'

seemingly contradictory views may be explained by the fact that under the influence of traditional English education, students hope to become as fluent as English native speakers in ideology, but in reality they do not have enough time or energy to practice English pronunciation. Moreover, almost all English examinations from primary school to university concentrate on reading, listening and writing skills.

There is a significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 groups in statement N18 ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that freshmen tend to practice English pronunciation more often than their seniors. In statement N20, Year 1 group has a significantly higher mean than Year 3 group ($p < 0.05$). These results suggest that Year 1 students are more attached to Standard English and have a stronger motivation for practicing English pronunciation than the other two groups.

Statements N12, N13 and N14 are also about the goal of English learning. The results reveal the students' willingness to communicate in English with foreigners, not just with British or Americans. Moreover, their English learning goals are not just examinations, but also for future practical purposes. The students' results are in line with the teachers' results (statements N19, N20, N21, and N22), in which the teachers expressed their disagreement with the examination-oriented teaching method, and claimed that their English teaching goal is to help students become capable of coping with diverse international communication situations.

The students' responses to statements N15 (Mean=4.00) and N16 (Mean=4.13) suggest that they have realized the critical role of cultures in language learning as well as the significance of expressing their own culture in English, consistent with the teachers' responses. Having realized the importance of "cultural soft power", China has made great efforts to expand the influence of its own culture worldwide, which may have enhanced both the students and teachers' cultural awareness. These results are in line with the former study conducted by Baker (2009).

It has been found that the students may not be equipped with enough communication strategies (N23, Mean=3.32), although they show willingness to solve problems when communication failures occur (N24, Mean=3.88). Interestingly, the teacher's results of the corresponding statements (N17 and N18, Mean>4.00) are different; the teachers claimed that they often teach intercultural communication strategies to their students in class. The gap between the students' and the teachers' responses implies that the students may not be satisfied with the current teaching of intercultural communication strategies.

The results from semi-structured interviews have provided further evidence for the participants' preference for RP and GA as English learning and teaching models, despite their awareness of ELF and English varieties. As one student said, "Although we know people in the world speak English differently, in China currently we still need to adopt RP or GA as our learning

norm because they are the standard and most English textbooks and exams are based on them." All the three teachers also mentioned, "We know ELF is the linguistic reality, but to incorporate ELF into our current English class will face a lot of challenges."

5.2 Attitudes towards ELF

In this study, it has been found that the students hold positive attitudes towards ELF and consider it necessary and advantageous to learn about ELF. Their positive attitudes are in line with their strong awareness of the lingua franca function of English. Significant differences have also been found between Year 1 and Year 3 groups, suggesting that Year 1 students have a stronger recognition of the necessity of learning ELF, as university freshmen are usually most highly motivated for learning.

It has also been found that the students seem to be mentally attached to Standard English (N27, Mean=3.80; N38, Mean=3.83). This result is consistent with the previous studies, which have reported that Chinese university students favored native English varieties (He & Miller, 2011; Xu, Wang, & Case, 2010). According to statement N28 (Mean=3.57), the students seem to believe that they can reach the level of Standard English as long as they make enough efforts. Their preference to Standard English may be explained by the fact that their English learning has been modeled on Standard English. The teacher participants share similar attitudes with the students (statement N37, Mean=3.93). In reality, they find that Standard English is not absolutely perfect, instead there exist many difficulties in English learning that they can hardly come over (Munro, 2008).

The students' attitudes towards English varieties show that they seem to become more tolerant of different English varieties. In recent decades, movies and dramas from India and Singapore etc. have gradually gained popularity among Chinese, where Indian English and Singaporean English can often be heard. It is thus not surprising that more and more people are aware of distinguished features of Englishes spoken in different countries. This result is in line with previous studies, which have found that intercultural communication failures are not often, due to communicators' joint efforts to make each other understood (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

There is a significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 students in statement N38, implying that the freshmen adhere more strongly to Standard English than their seniors, even though they both accept the existence of English varieties. This result suggests that a change of attitude is necessary; English learning goal should be adjusted from the native speaker norm to international intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000).

The students' attitudes towards intelligibility suggest that the students agree that they care more about intelligibility than correctness or being standard when communicating with non-native speakers. This finding is

consistent with Jenkins' (2006) study that people feel less stressed while speaking English in front of non-native speakers. It suggests that they have already realized that they can make themselves understood in English communication, though indeed they speak differently from RP or GA at times. Moreover, "being not standard" does not mean that we abandon and despise all the rules of English; instead we still share the core of English, just holding a more open and tolerant attitude towards various Englishes spoken by people from different circles (Wen, 2012).

In terms of attitudes towards China English (Statements N40 to N45), it has been found that the students obviously agree that they should try to avoid speaking China English and they mind having Chinese features in their use of English. There are significant differences between Year 1 and Year 2 groups in statement N43, and Year 1 and Year 3 in statement N44, suggesting that freshmen mind using China English when they use or speak English. This implies their very strong unwillingness to have Chinese characteristics in the use of English. The students' negative attitudes towards China English are a reflection of their preference to Standard English.

With regards to intercultural communication (N46, Mean=4.07), the students agree that the learning of communication skills and strategies are of great importance. This is also in line with the teachers' results in the corresponding statement (N45, Mean=3.90). Since the study of intercultural communication has been introduced into English class, both the teachers and students have realized that communication strategies are indispensable in guaranteeing a smooth and successful communication in English. In statement N49 (Mean=4.03), the students think knowledge of different countries' cultures is important for successful communication, which also indicates their positive attitudes towards the learning of cultural components. There is a significant difference between Year 1 and Year 2 students in statement N49, indicating that freshmen have a stronger recognition of the critical role of cultures than sophomores.

It has also been found that the students are not content with the present English curriculum, for they don't think they have enough and rich knowledge for coping with various communication situations. Therefore, they show their willingness to learn more about ELF in future English class. There is a significant difference between Year 1 and Year 2 students in the last statement, inferring that freshmen have stronger requirement of and need for learning ELF in the future. This result calls our attention to the necessity of incorporating ELF into English class for first year students.

The results from semi-structured interviews are consistent with those from the questionnaire. The participants all hold very positive attitudes towards ELF. Despite their preference for Standard English, they are conscious of the importance of intelligibility in intercultural communication. As one of our student interviewees said, "We aim at speaking RP and GA, but we know that is hard to achieve, so we believe as long as we can make

ourselves understood in intercultural communication, that is enough." The teachers being interviewed all explicitly expressed their willingness to introduce ELF in their class in the future. Holding a positive attitude towards ELF will surely be a good starting point for incorporating an ELF orientation in ELT.

6 Conclusion

By involving 168 university students and 30 teachers as participants, this study has investigated the students' and teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards ELF. The following is a summary of the major findings.

(1) Both the students and the teachers are well aware of the fact that English is being used as a lingua franca, but their knowledge of ELF does not seem sufficient. Most of the participants hold a highly positive attitude towards ELF, and the students have expressed their willingness to learn about it in English class.

(2) The participants are still mentally attached to the notion of Standard English and they often take the native speaker norm as their learning or teaching goal.

(3) The participants accept the existence of various English varieties in different countries. However, the students seem to show more favorable attitudes towards English varieties in the Outer Circle than those in the Expanding Circle, as they do not take China English as a legitimate variety like Indian English and Singaporean English.

(4) Both the students and the teachers consider intelligibility as more important than correctness or being standard when communicating with non-native English speakers.

(5) The students recognize the critical role of culture in English learning and intercultural communication.

(6) Both the students and the teachers show great consent to the learning and teaching of communication strategies and hold positive attitudes towards the use of them in intercultural communication.

This study has some limitations as follows. First, only non-English majors and college English teachers have been involved. In future studies, English majors and their corresponding teachers may be taken into consideration, so that a more general picture about the practice of ELF can be obtained. Second, this study has only carried out a comparative analysis between three years of university students. A comparative study between students and teachers may also be desirable. Third, this study is mainly based on self-designed questionnaires as there were very few previous studies. Further research is needed to consolidate the results obtained in the current study.

The findings of the present study have important implications for English learning and teaching. Since the participants' knowledge about ELF is not sufficient, it is the teachers' responsibility to help enrich students with up-to-date knowledge. As many studies have suggested, both teachers and learners' awareness of and attitudes towards a language phenomenon are significant for enhancing language education (e.g., Giles & Bill, 2004). Therefore, it is suggested that English teachers reconsider their beliefs and teaching practices, and update curriculums by introducing new courses about ELF, English varieties, and intercultural communication strategies.

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