

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA: CONCEPTS AND DIFFERENCES WITH WORLD ENGLISHES

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Abstract

English has become a global means of communication used by speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This condition challenges the traditional view of English that prioritizes native-speaker norms and standard varieties. Two influential frameworks that address this global use of English are English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE). However, the conceptual distinction between these two perspectives is often unclear, particularly in educational contexts. This study aims to explore pre-service English teachers' understanding of English as a Lingua Franca and its differences from World Englishes within the framework of Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL). The research employed a qualitative descriptive design involving 15 undergraduate students of an English Education program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaire responses and analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis. The findings reveal that most participants perceive ELF as a functional tool for communication that emphasizes intelligibility and mutual understanding rather than native-speaker accuracy. Meanwhile, World Englishes is generally understood as recognizing the existence of multiple English varieties shaped by local and cultural contexts. Although many participants were able to distinguish between ELF and WE, some conceptual overlap was evident in how they described communicative functions and language varieties. Overall, the study suggests the importance of explicitly integrating ELF and WE concepts into TEIL to promote a more inclusive and realistic understanding of English as a global language.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, World Englishes, TEIL, Global English, Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

English has increasingly functioned as a global medium of communication among speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In contemporary international, academic, and professional contexts, English is predominantly used by multilingual speakers rather than by native speakers. This global reality challenges traditional views of English that prioritize native-speaker norms and standardized varieties, prompting scholars to reconceptualize English as a more inclusive and pluralized global language. English as a Lingua Franca emphasizes intelligibility and communicative effectiveness over adherence to native-speaker norms in multilingual communication (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2018; Cogo, 2018).

Two influential frameworks that address the global use of English are World Englishes (WE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). World Englishes emphasizes the existence of multiple legitimate varieties of English that have developed within specific sociocultural and historical contexts. From this perspective, English is viewed as a plural language shaped by local identities, histories, and communicative needs, and non-native varieties are recognized as valid forms of English use rather than deviations from a single standard (Wei, 2020).

English as a Lingua Franca, by contrast, refers to the use of English as a shared means of communication among speakers who do not share the same first language. ELF places

emphasis on communicative effectiveness, intelligibility, and pragmatic strategies in multilingual interactions. Rather than adhering strictly to native-speaker norms, ELF prioritizes successful meaning negotiation and mutual understanding among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds (López Jaramillo, Dávila, & Espinoza Jarquín, 2020).

Although WE and ELF both address the global spread and use of English, they differ in their analytical focus. WE primarily concentrate on the description and legitimization of English varieties worldwide, whereas ELF focuses on language use and interactional processes in real-time communication. However, leading to conceptual overlap and confusion in teacher education discourse and pedagogical practices (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2021).

Despite an extensive body of research on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE), there remains a clear research gap in empirical studies examining how pre-service English teachers in non-native English-speaking contexts conceptualize and distinguish between these two frameworks, particularly within Indonesian teacher education programs. Previous studies have predominantly focused on theoretical discussions or have been conducted in contexts outside Indonesia, resulting in limited empirical evidence on teachers' conceptual understandings of ELF and WE and their pedagogical implications (Leyi, 2020; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018; Cogo, 2018; Fang, 2021). Understanding how future teachers interpret ELF and WE are crucial, as these interpretations may shape instructional perspectives and engagement with TEIL oriented approaches.

Therefore, this study aims to explore pre-service English teachers' understanding of English as a Lingua Franca and World Englishes, examine how they differentiate between the two concepts, and investigate the perceived relevance of ELF in global communication and English language teaching. The novelty of this study lies in its empirical focus on pre-service teachers' conceptualizations of ELF and WE within an Indonesian EFL context, an area that remains underrepresented in existing research. This study contributes to ongoing discussions on Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017; Galloway & Rose, 2018).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to explore and describe conceptual understandings of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and its differences from World Englishes (WE), rather than to test hypotheses or analyze numerical data.

The research procedure was conducted chronologically. First, the literature focused on theoretical discussions of ELF and World Englishes in global English contexts. Second, participants were selected using purposive sampling. The participants consisted of 15 undergraduate students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang with an English education background.

Third, data were collected through guided open-ended written questions. The instrument consisted of ten questions designed to explore several key aspects of pre-service English teachers' understanding on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE), including their conceptual understanding of ELF and WE, perceived differences between the two, and their views on the relevance of ELF for global communication and English language teaching in EFL contexts. This approach allowed participants to express their views freely and provided qualitative data aligned with the research objectives.

Finally, the collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The analysis involved reading participants' responses carefully, identifying key ideas, and categorizing them into thematic patterns. The interpretation of the findings was supported by recent theoretical literature to maintain coherence between participants' perspectives and established scholarly discussions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Pre-Service Teachers' Conceptual Understanding of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE)

This section presents the findings derived from the qualitative analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses provided by pre-service English teachers at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. The analysis revealed one overarching theme, namely pre-service teachers' conceptual understanding of Global English, which encompasses three closely related dimensions:

1. Understanding of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF),
2. Understanding of World Englishes (WE), and
3. Understanding of the conceptual distinction between ELF and WE.

These dimensions are analytically separated in the discussion below to enhance clarity while maintaining thematic coherence. Overall, the data indicate that pre-service teachers conceptualize English primarily as a global means of communication rather than as a language owned by native speakers. Their responses reflect an awareness of English as a functional, flexible, and context-sensitive resource for interaction in multilingual and multicultural settings.

A. Understanding of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

Analysis of the questionnaire data indicates that the majority of pre-service teachers conceptualize English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a shared means of communication among speakers with different first languages, as reflected in their repeated emphasis on communication across national and linguistic boundaries. Participants emphasized that ELF prioritizes mutual understanding and communicative effectiveness over strict adherence to native-speaker norms or grammatical perfection. This understanding reflects a pragmatic and function-oriented view of English, in which successful communication is measured by clarity of meaning and achievement of communicative goals rather than conformity to native-centric standards.

Several participants explicitly described ELF as 'English used to communicate with people from different countries' and "English that focuses on understanding rather than accent," indicating a recurring pattern in the data that frames ELF as a practice-oriented mode of communication rather than a fixed linguistic system. These statements indicate that pre-service teachers conceptualize ELF as a communicative practice rather than a fixed linguistic system. This view aligns with ELF scholarship that frames English as a dynamic resource shaped by interactional needs in multilingual contexts (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2018). Most participants highlighted that variation in accent, grammar, and vocabulary is acceptable in ELF contexts, provided that communicative goals are achieved, suggesting a shared orientation toward intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy. This

understanding is consistent with findings from Indonesian and broader Asian multilingual settings, which demonstrate that English functions effectively as a lingua franca when speakers negotiate meaning and adapt their language use rather than strive for native-like accuracy (Cahyadi & Fitriyah, 2024; Santoso et al., 2023). Such perspectives reflect an awareness of ELF as an inclusive communicative tool that facilitates interaction across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Cogo, 2018; Suoc et al., 2025). Furthermore, some pre-service teachers explicitly acknowledged the global relevance of ELF, describing it as a bridge that connects individuals from different nations and cultural backgrounds. This understanding resonates with research emphasizing the role of ELF in intercultural communication, particularly in globalized contexts where English serves as the primary medium of exchange (Tsai, 2025). Importantly, this emphasis on communicative effectiveness also reflects a broader awareness of English as a facilitator of intercultural interaction rather than merely a linguistic code.

B. Understanding of World Englishes (WE)

In addition to their understanding of English as a Lingua Franca, pre-service English teachers also demonstrated an awareness of World Englishes (WE) as a framework that emphasizes the plurality of English varieties used across different sociocultural contexts. The majority of participants conceptualized WE as referring to multiple legitimate forms of English that have developed in specific countries and communities, often associating these varieties with local cultural identity and historical background.

Participants' responses indicate that WE is perceived not merely as linguistic variation, but as recognition of ownership and legitimacy of English beyond native-speaker norms. Several respondents emphasized that varieties such as Indian English or Singapore English should not be regarded as incorrect or deficient forms of English, but rather as valid outcomes of English use within particular sociocultural environments. This understanding reflects a core principle of the WE paradigm, which challenges the dominance of a single standardized model of English and promotes linguistic equality among global English users (Kachru, 1985; Wei, 2020).

From the participants' perspective, English is understood as a global language that belongs to its users rather than to a specific native-speaking community. Such conceptualization aligns with previous studies suggesting that WE-oriented awareness can foster inclusivity and cultural sensitivity in English language education by validating learners' linguistic identities and sociocultural backgrounds (Galloway & Rose, 2018; Nguyen, 2025).

Overall, pre-service teachers' understanding of WE demonstrates an emerging sociolinguistic awareness that English exists in multiple legitimate forms shaped by diverse historical, cultural, and communicative contexts. This awareness is particularly important in non-native English-speaking contexts, where local varieties of English are often used in educational, professional, and intercultural communication.

C. Conceptual Distinction between English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE)

Analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses reveals that most pre-service English teachers are able to articulate a clear conceptual distinction between English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE), despite recognizing that both concepts

operate within the broader framework of Global English. Participants primarily differentiated the two frameworks based on their analytical focus and function in global communication.

ELF was consistently understood as referring to the use of English in real-time interaction among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Participants emphasized that ELF focuses on how English functions as a communicative tool, prioritizing intelligibility, flexibility, and the negotiation of meaning during interaction. In this sense, ELF is conceptualized as interaction-oriented and practice-based, where communicative success is measured by mutual understanding rather than conformity to native-speaker norms. In contrast, World Englishes (WE) was understood as focusing on the existence and legitimacy of relatively stable English varieties that have developed within particular sociocultural and historical contexts. Participants associated WE with recognizable localized varieties of English and emphasized that these varieties reflect cultural identity and social realities. This positions WE as variety-oriented and sociolinguistically grounded, emphasizing what forms English takes as it becomes embedded in different communities.

Importantly, participants did not view ELF and WE as competing or contradictory frameworks. Instead, they perceived them as complementary: ELF explains how English is used as a shared communicative resource in multilingual interaction, while WE explains what English becomes as it adapts to diverse sociocultural environments. This distinction closely mirrors established theoretical discussions that conceptualize ELF as interaction-focused and WE as variety-focused (Leyi, 2020; Erdem, 2025). The emergence of this distinction from participants' own responses rather than from imposed theoretical definitions indicates an increasing level of conceptual awareness among pre-service English teachers. Such awareness is significant for teacher education, as it suggests a shift away from simplified, native-speaker-centered views of English toward a more nuanced understanding that integrates communicative functionality and linguistic diversity.

2. Relevance of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE) in Today's Global Communication

Based on pre-service teachers' conceptual understanding as reflected in their written responses, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is perceived as highly relevant in contemporary global communication. One respondent stated that "English is mostly used to communicate with people from different countries, so it does not need to be perfect as long as mutual understanding can be achieved. Participants consistently described English as a language predominantly used among non-native speakers in international interactions, rather than as a system bound to native-speaker ownership. This understanding corresponds with empirical ELF research showing that most global English interactions occur among multilingual speakers who rely on intelligibility rather than native norms (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Seidlhofer, 2018).

Participants framed English use in contexts such as international education, business communication, online collaboration, academic discussions, travel, and virtual communities. For them, English functions primarily as a practical tool for achieving communicative goals, where mutual understanding and clarity are prioritized over grammatical perfection, accent accuracy, or native-like vocabulary use. This conceptualization aligns with studies indicating that ELF communication prioritizes functional effectiveness and meaning negotiation in real-world multilingual encounters (Cogo, 2018; Galloway & Rose, 2018).

This empirically grounded understanding demonstrates that pre-service teachers do not merely reproduce abstract theoretical definitions of ELF, but instead conceptualize it based on its communicative function in authentic global interactions. Such a view reflects a gradual shift away from native-speaker-oriented ideologies, as also identified in studies of pre-service teachers' ELF awareness in Asian EFL contexts (Fang, 2021; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018).

This communicative orientation expressed by the participants aligns closely with the World Englishes (WE) framework, particularly in their recognition of the legitimacy of diverse English varieties shaped by local linguistic and cultural contexts. Respondents' understanding reflects the core WE principle that variation in English use should not be viewed as deficiency, but as a natural sociolinguistic outcome of English spreading across different communities (Kachru, 1985; Kachru, 1992; Wei, 2020). From the participants' perspective, English belongs to its global users, and its forms are shaped by cultural and historical realities rather than a single standardized norm.

In this sense, the data reveal that pre-service teachers conceptually link ELF and WE as complementary frameworks. ELF is understood as emphasizing communicative function in interaction, while WE is understood as emphasizing linguistic diversity and identity. This distinction mirrors previous theoretical discussions that position ELF as interaction-focused and WE as variety-focused, yet this study demonstrates how such distinctions are internalized at the level of teacher cognition (Leyi, 2020; Galloway, 2020).

Furthermore, participants' responses indicate an understanding that ELF enables speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to adapt their language use flexibly. They highlighted communicative strategies such as paraphrasing, clarification requests, and tolerance of grammatical and phonological variation as essential for maintaining effective communication. These strategies are widely documented as key features of ELF interaction in multilingual settings (Jenkins et al., 2011; Cogo, 2018). For instance, respondents referred to interactions between Indonesian speakers and peers from countries such as Thailand, Japan, or India, where shared meaning can be successfully achieved despite differences in pronunciation patterns or grammatical conventions. This reflects findings from Indonesian ELF studies showing that intelligibility and accommodation are central to successful intercultural communication (Santoso et al., 2023; Cahyadi & Fitriyah, 2024).

Recent studies also emphasize that ELF is particularly significant in higher education and professional contexts, where individuals frequently engage with international collaborators. The participants' conceptual understanding reflects this reality, as they viewed ELF as enabling inclusive communication, reducing anxiety associated with native-like performance, and fostering confidence among non-native English users (Fang, 2021; Tsai, 2025). Simultaneously, the WE framework reinforces participants' understanding that such interactions are shaped by multiple legitimate English varieties, thereby validating multilingual speakers' linguistic identities and communicative practices (Nguyen, 2025).

Moreover, participants recognized that the growing prevalence of online platforms, international conferences, and global professional networks has amplified the relevance of both ELF and WE. This awareness is consistent with studies showing that ELF-oriented communication strategies contribute to improved collaboration, problem-solving, and intercultural competence in multinational teams (Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021; Suoc et al., 2025). From the pre-service teachers' perspective, ELF functions not merely as a linguistic

tool, but together with WE as a sociocultural bridge that promotes inclusivity, mutual respect, and effective communication in today's globalized world.

3. The Role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and World Englishes (WE) in English Language Teaching in Non-Native Contexts

In relation to English language teaching, respondents articulated a clear understanding of the relevance of ELF-oriented pedagogy, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts such as Indonesia. Another respondent explained that “ELF-oriented teaching helps students feel more confident using English without fear of making mistakes.” Based on their responses, pre-service teachers conceptualized ELF as an approach that can reduce learners' anxiety associated with achieving native-like accuracy and instead emphasize communicative competence, intelligibility, and confidence in real global interactions. This understanding reflects findings from Indonesian EFL research indicating that ELF-aware pedagogy helps shift learning goals from accuracy-driven outcomes toward meaningful communication (Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021; Cahyadi & Fitriyah, 2024).

In addition, participants demonstrated an understanding of the role of World Englishes (WE) in shaping English language teaching practices. They recognized that awareness of WE helps learners accept the legitimacy of diverse English varieties and understand that localized forms of English are natural outcomes of global language use. This aligns with WE-informed pedagogical studies which argue that exposure to diverse English varieties enhances learners' intercultural awareness and linguistic confidence (Leyi, 2020; Galloway & Rose, 2018).

These empirically derived understandings support arguments that ELF-aware and WE-informed approaches can broaden learning objectives, prioritize pragmatic communication skills, and better reflect authentic global English use (Fang, 2021; Galloway, 2020). Importantly, in this study, such alignment is grounded in pre-service teachers' conceptualizations rather than imposed theoretical assumptions, thereby reinforcing the study's empirical contribution within the Indonesian EFL context.

However, participants also identified challenges in implementing ELF and WE perspectives in classroom practice, including limited teacher familiarity with these frameworks, the persistence of native-speaker norms in curricula and assessment, and the lack of suitable instructional materials. Similar challenges have been reported in Indonesian EFL studies, which note a gap between positive conceptual orientations toward ELF and WE and the practical realities of classroom implementation (Ramadhani & Muslim, 2021; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018). This finding highlights the need for more systematic integration of ELF and WE into teacher education programs to support future teachers in translating conceptual understanding into pedagogical practice.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of questionnaires from pre-service English teachers, it can be concluded that the pre-service teachers understand English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as the use of English for communication among speakers with different linguistic backgrounds, emphasizing clarity, intelligibility, and communicative effectiveness over adherence to native-speaker norms. They also recognize the existence of World Englishes (WE) as various legitimate forms of English used worldwide, reflecting local cultural identities and affirming that English is a global language. The pre-service teachers generally understand the distinction between ELF and WE, where ELF focuses on the functional use of English in international communication, while WE highlights the diversity of English varieties that have developed across different communities. ELF is considered highly relevant in today's global communication, as most English interactions occur between non-native speakers, and its application in English language teaching in Indonesia helps develop practical communication skills, enhance pre-service teachers' confidence, and emphasize communicative usage over imitation of native accents or grammatical norms. Overall, pre-service teachers' understanding of ELF and WE supports the principles of Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL), emphasizing effective communication, inclusivity, and appreciation for the diversity of global English, while preparing them to become adaptive, communicative, and culturally sensitive future teachers.

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