



Developing EIL Awareness Through *Japanese–Thai* Virtual Exchange

Evidence from the SMILE Project

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Background of the study

- English has become a global lingua franca, with **non-native English speakers** outnumbering native speakers by up to four times (Jenkins, 2014).
- **English Language Teaching** has been guided by native-speaker norms e.g. US & UK (Phillipson, 1992; Rose & Galloway, 2019)
- Most English communication occurs between **non-native speakers** (Jenkins, 2007)
- **English as an International Language (EIL)** to reflect global use of English (McKay, 2018)

Current challenges in ELF contexts

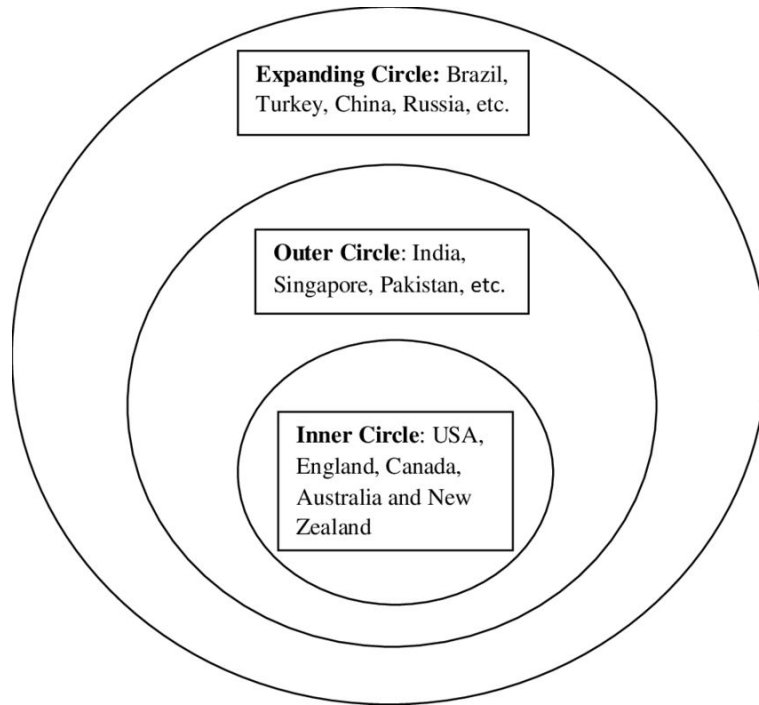
- ELT practices e.g. material, content, etc. relied on native norms (Galloway & Rose, 2019)
- EFL learners have limited exposure to diverse English users (Matsuda, 2012)
- Authentic intercultural interaction is rare in local classrooms (Baker, 2015)

Pedagogical Need

- Developing EIL awareness is a growing pedagogical priority (McKay, 2002; Rose & Galloway, 2019)
- Learners need opportunities to use English for real intercultural communication (Jenkins, 2007)
- Technology enables accessible and sustainable intercultural interaction (O'Dowd, 2018)

World Englishes & EIL

- World Englishes recognizes multiple legitimate varieties of English (Kachru, 1985)
- English as an International Language (EIL) emphasizes intelligibility and intercultural communication over native norms (Kirkpatrick, 2007)



Kachru's (1985) Three Circles Model

Virtual Exchange in Language Education

- Virtual exchange provides authentic intercultural communication opportunities and it is a practical alternative to study-abroad experiences(O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016; O'Dowd, 2018)



SMILE

Students Meet Internationally through Language Education

Founded by
Prof. Shigenori Wakabayashi
Prof. Jun Iio

- More than 50 participating schools (Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea)
- Communication conducted entirely through synchronous online meeting.
- SMILE project promotes authentic communication and intercultural exchange



- save cost
- English communication
- cultural exchanges



Research Gap

Despite growing interest in EIL and virtual exchange, **limited empirical research has examined short-term virtual interactions influence learners' perceptions of English as an International Language**, particularly in Asian university contexts.

Research Question

To what extent does participation in virtual exchange meetings influence learners' perceptions of EIL?

Context of the Study

Participants: Thai students (n=28), Japanese students (n=14).

- Age of the participants: 18-24 years old
- Years of learning English: Thai (7-10 years) / Japanese (1-6 years)
- Self-perceived English proficiency: Thai (B1-B2) / Japanese (A2-C2)

Project Duration: 1 month (October 2025)

Communication mean: Google Meet.



Class preparation

Silpakorn University (n=28)

Recruitment

- Third year students, majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT), enrolling in an ELT course in 1/2025 semester
- First time of virtual exchange

Technology preparation

- No preparation needed, students familiar with virtual channels

Agreement

- Students informed of volunteering and instant withdrawal at any time



Class preparation

Chuo University (n=8)

Recruitment

- Junior, Senior, and Graduate Students, all major in English linguistics.
- All were supervised by Wakabayashi.

Technology preparation

- Not much. Most have participated in one or more SMILE Projects before.

Agreement

- The consent form was signed before start the first collaboration class.



Class preparation

Aichi Institute of Technology (n=6)

Recruitment

- First year and second year engineering students taking an elective course, “Workshop A” Speaking Level: A2 (3) & B1 (3) (Measured by LangX, an Ai-based speaking test)

Technology preparation

- Explained how to access Google Meet & Spreadsheet

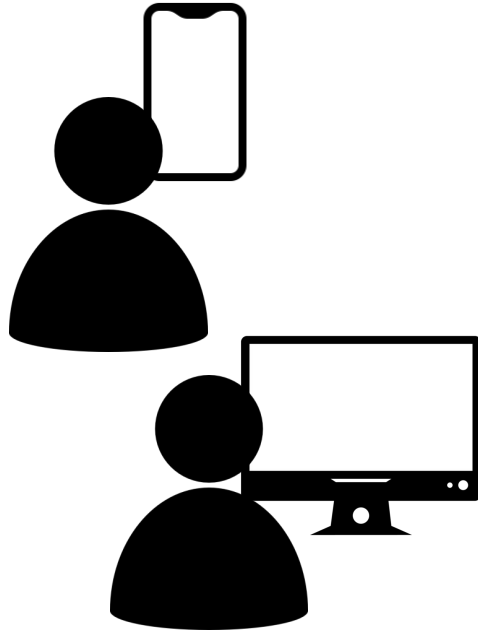
Agreement

- The consent form was signed before the first meeting date.

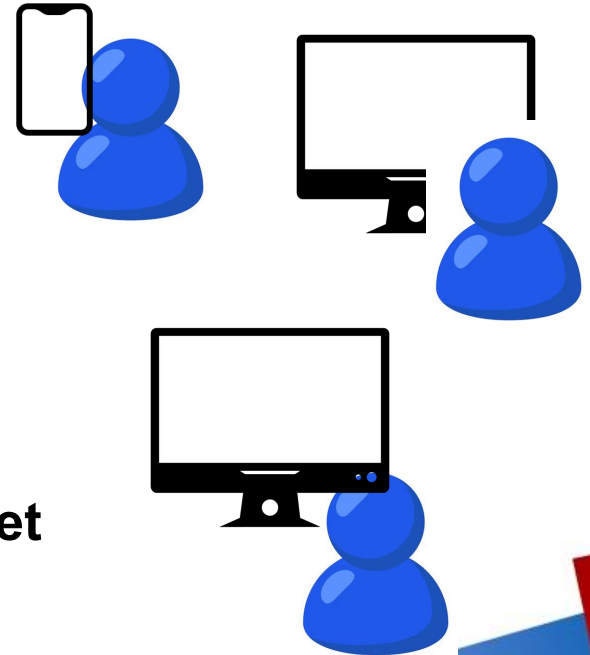


	(1) Orientation	(2) Actual meeting for three times in 1 month	(3) Closing
Month/ year	Oct 3, 2025	Oct 8-27, 2025	Oct 29, 2025
Activites	1. The introduction of purposes & overall SMILE project 2. The first meeting to set up a plan with partner friends	Student's autonomous meeting on topics: 1. Myself 2. Culture 3. Dream and goal	1. Students' reflection 2. Feedback given on Google form
Purpose	To introduce to the program and set the agreement	To talk in English To exchange cultures	To reflect exchanging experience
Time spent	60 minutes	60 minutes / three times	30 minutes

Thai students



Japanese students



“autonomous SMILE”

60 mins

x3 times

Three meetings:
students **agreed on**
dates and time to meet

Course management



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1		Google Meet URL for all-member meetings:	https://meet.google.com/han-epps-otz				
2		Padlet (for self-introduction video)	https://padlet.com/fujimurakeiji/about-you-video-introduction-chi4qiya9nd7wuo5				
3			Link 1	Link 2			
4	Before meeting	Pre-survey	https://forms.gle/EvjvixxiNhvYt		https://forms.gle/hXszEcTr6m9hB.IXD6		
5		1st meeting- self-introduction	https://forms.gle/vU4ng52Ff2rQpawH8				
6	During meeting	2nd meeting - culture	https://forms.gle/813vpJCfq7fQPr2h6				
7		3rd meeting - goals and dreams	https://forms.gle/761zsX5hg1ofkvLf8				
8	After meeting	Post-survey	https://forms.gle/EvjvixxiNhvYt		https://forms.gle/4eEn354mzS9i3iCv5		
9		Instruction for the project:					
10	Line group						
11		Report File Template for Downloading or Copying:					
12							
13							

[Sample](#) (excluding, names, IDs & Email)



Opening SU-AIT-Chuo SMILE on Oct 3, 2025



Closing SU-AIT-Chuo SMILE on Oct 29, 2025

Methodology (research tools)

Instruments:

1. English as an International Language Perception scale (EILPS) (rating scale) adopted from Nakamura et al. (2018)
2. Written reflection on Google Form adapted from Nakamura et al. (2018)

Data Analysis:

1. Descriptive statistics ($\bar{x}$, S.D) Inferential statistics (The Mann-Whitney U tests, effect size)
2. Inductive thematic analysis (Open coding, Axial coding, Selective coding)

EILPS

The **English as an International Language Perception Scale (EILPS)** is a validated self-report questionnaire designed by Nakamura et al. (2018) to measure learners' perceptions and attitudes toward English as a global means of communication. (e.g. da Costa & Rose, 2024; Lee, 2021; Suzuki et al., 2025)

Rather than focusing on linguistic proficiency, the scale examines how learners conceptualize English in relation to **global use, diversity, communication strategies, and speaker identity**.

The questionnaire consists of **14 Likert-scale items** (0= I don't know 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) grouped into **four dimensions**:

1. **Current Status of English (CSE)** – learners' perceived awareness of English as a widely used international language across countries and domains.
2. **Varieties of English (VE)** – learners' perceived acceptance of multiple English varieties, accents, and non-native speaker interactions.
3. **Strategies for Multilingual/Multicultural Communication (SMC)** – learners' perceived ability to adapt communication strategies when interacting with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
4. **English Speaker Identity (ESI)** – learners' perceived views on ownership of English, including attitudes toward native-speaker norms and confidence in using their own English.



EILPS

The fourteen items

Factors and Items of EIL Perception Scale

Current Status of English (CSE)

(CSE 1) English is used today as an international language to communicate effectively with people from around the world.

(CSE 2) Many non-native English-speaking countries currently use English as their official or working language.

(CSE 3) English is the language of business, culture, and education around the world today.

Varieties of English (VE)

(VE 1) Different varieties of English, such as Hong Kong English, Indian English, and Singaporean English, are acceptable today.

(VE 2) Teachers can use English listening materials that are recorded by people who have different kinds of English accents.

(VE 3) Different varieties of English, such as Indonesian English, Taiwanese English, and Japanese English, are acceptable today.

(VE 4) Teachers can include the interaction between non-native and non-native English speakers (e.g., Indonesian-Japanese speakers) in English listening materials.

Strategies for Multilingual/Multicultural Communication (SMC)

(SMC 1) I can adjust my conversational style according to my interactions with people of other cultural backgrounds.

(SMC 2) I can explain my own culture and customs clearly in English to people from other cultures.

(SMC 3) I am open-minded about accepting speaking/pronunciation patterns that are different from those of my home country.

(SMC 4) I can behave appropriately according to English users I speak with.

English Speakers' Identity (ESI)

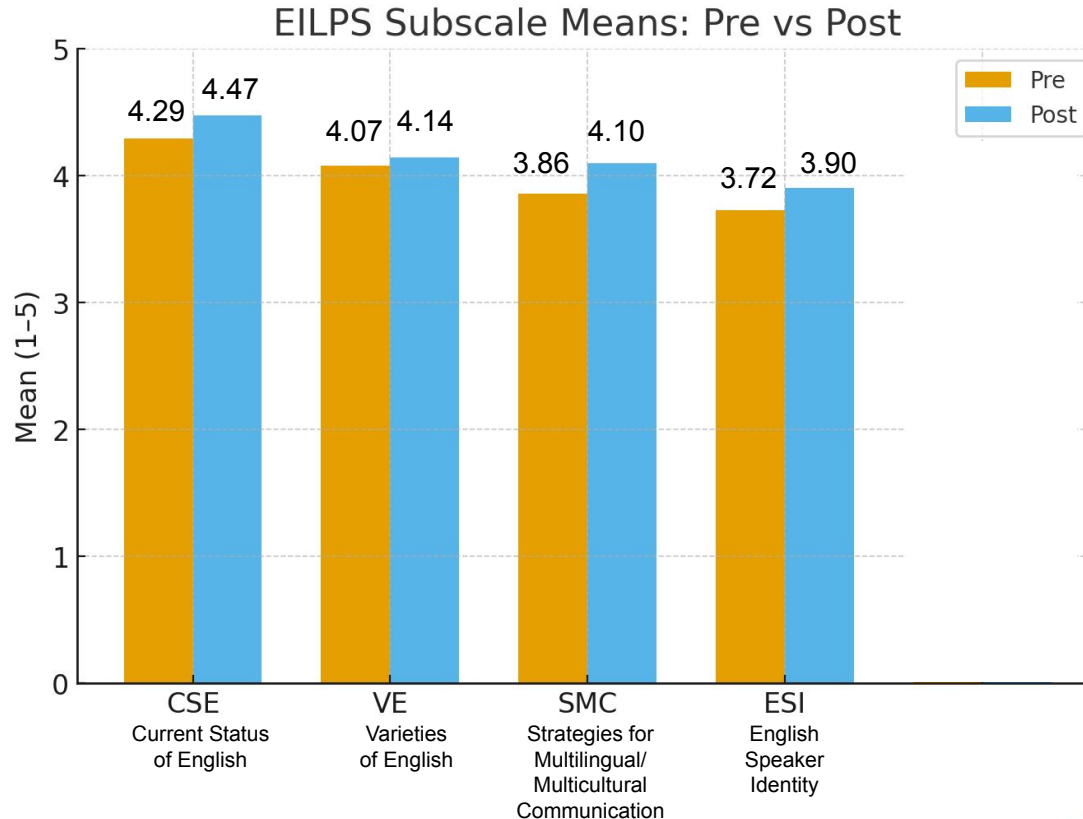
(ESI 1) English teachers should not push me to speak like a "native" English speaker.

(ESI 2) I don't mind if people laugh at my English accent when I speak because it is my own English.

(ESI 3) It is unnecessary to speak like American or British English speakers as long as my English is intelligible (or understandable) to others.

Findings

EILPS English as an International



p-values are
> .05
no statistically
significant
differences

Pre–Post Mean Differences

Overall Pattern

- All four subscales showed **positive mean gains** from pre- to post-survey.
- No subscale demonstrated a decline in mean scores.

Subscale-Specific Insights

- **SMC** recorded the **largest mean increase** ($\Delta\bar{x} = +0.24$), suggesting notable growth in learners' communication strategies.
- **CSE** and **ESI** showed **moderate gains** ($\Delta\bar{x} = +0.18$), indicating increased confidence and identity awareness as English users.
- **VE** showed a **small increase** ($\Delta\bar{x} = +0.07$), suggesting relatively stable views toward English varieties.

Although mean scores increased across all aspects, **inferential tests did not detect statistically significant differences.**

Qualitative findings

Inductive thematic analysis (Open coding, Axial coding, Selective coding)

Looking back on the whole project, did you enjoy the meeting? What was most enjoyable or most difficult for you? [GEN]

As a whole, I enjoyed the meeting. What I enjoyed the most was the second meeting. I started to learn English when I was a junior high school student. For about nine years I have learned English, there are not enough opportunities to share my own culture with people from foreign countries. So, sharing my culture was very interesting and fresh for me. On the other hand, what I found the most difficult was the topic that was give in the third meeting. The reason was that I didn't know enough words to share my own dream. When I was a high school student, my English teacher said to me that when you don't know the words or phrases to express your own idea, you should use the words or phrases you already know. Through the third meeting, however, I noticed that if I know few words, it is hard to explain things.

Enjoyment of the project

Opportunities to express own cultures.

The uses of strategies when facing communicative difficulties.



Looking back on the whole project, did you enjoy the meeting?
What was most enjoyable or most difficult for you? [GEN]

Yes, I really enjoyed this project. I enjoyed that I practiced english in a real conversation. This project helps me improve my own English skill (Speaking and listening). Moreover, I met new people, and I understand different of accent. The difficulty that I found throughout the project is at first, I feel nervous when I speak too quickly and the listener don't understand me, so I change my speaking style like speak more slowly and use many strategies like body-gesture or showing picture.

Enjoyment from the practice

Authentic communication

Perceived enhancement of English skills

Understanding of accent differences

The uses of strategies when facing communicative difficulties .



Did you enjoy today's meeting? What did you enjoy or find difficult? [GEN]

Today is an amazing day!! It was the last day that we had to meet before ending the project, we communicated about dreams and goals for a long time. It was surprised that we are in common about them since we were young. In addition, we are planing to go to overseas after graduated from university to cheer up the football team which is Liverpool team. Our goal is pass the license from the major.

Lovely Flower, Journal 4

Share common things between two countries

Shared goals

Enjoy talking with Japanese students

Difficulty in communication from pronunciation and speed

Enjoy learning Japanese cultures

Enjoy making new friends

I enjoyed talking with the Japanese students, but sometimes it was difficult to understand their pronunciation and speaking speed. I also found it challenging to explain my ideas clearly in English. However, I liked learning about Japanese culture and sharing my own experiences. It was fun to communicate and make new friends.

Potato, Journal 4

Qualitative findings

Themes

1. **Perceiving Communication Strategies as More Important than Linguistic Accuracy**

Students came to value successful communication through negotiation, clarification, gestures, repetition, and paraphrasing rather than speaking grammatically perfect English.

2. **Understanding the Diversity of English Use**

Students realised that English is spoken in many accents and varieties and that successful communication does not require a native-speaker model.

3. **Accepting Diverse English-speaking Identities**

Students increasingly viewed themselves and other non-native speakers as legitimate English users.

Discussion and conclusion

Although inferential statistics showed **no significant differences**, qualitative reflections revealed **clear developmental processes** underlying the small quantitative gains.

In **CSE**, students consistently described English as “*used everywhere*,” “*necessary*,” and “*a world language*”, supporting the **high pre-test means and modest post-test increase**. This shows **reinforcement rather than change**.

For **VE**, learners repeatedly acknowledged that *people from different countries use English differently*, aligning with the **stable quantitative scores** and suggesting that **conceptual acceptance preceded measurement**.

Discussion and conclusion

The strongest convergence appeared in **SMC**, where students explicitly reported:

- shifting focus from **grammatical accuracy** to **being understood**,
- using **strategies such as paraphrasing, slowing down, or adjusting language**, which explains why SMC showed the **largest mean gain and strongest effect sizes**, despite non-significant p-values.

In **ESI**, reflections showed **emerging confidence** (e.g., feeling less afraid to speak, accepting “imperfect English”), yet identity statements remained small which reflected the **small quantitative changes** and suggesting that **identity develops more slowly than strategy use**.



Thank You

Q&A